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DOROTHEA:

■ STORY OF THE PURE IN HEART.

DOROTHEA

A STORY OF THE PURE IN HEART

BY

MAARTEN MAARTENS.

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TO THEE,

WHO DWELLEST SO NEAR THE HEART OF GOD,

THAT I, BEING SO NEAR TO THEE,

CANNOT BE SO FAR FROM HIM AS I OFTEN FEAR,

TO THEE I DEDICATE THIS BOOK.

DOROTHEA :

A STORY OF THE PURE IN HEART.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

SLOWLY the winter morning awoke.

Slowly beyond the far, fathomless darkness the first lines of faint colour crept, trembling, along the horizon. In the dull, grey silence the sleepy earth hung, still. Shade after shade of pallid coldness lengthened, in sluggish certainty of increase, across the slaty sky. And the laggard hours, with ashen cheeks, gazed backwards, upon the sunless depths that yawned below.

Suddenly, from out the amber vastness of the empty east, two white rays flung themselves forwards, as if a woman, uprising from slumber, should flash across the sable coverlet the pearly radiance of her arms. Yet nothing stirred. The million lives that start awake to greet a summer sunrise were dead, or sick, or numbed to rest in wretchedness and want. Upon the grim December daybreak weighed the loneliness of death. One by one, as shrouded lamps are lighted in some funeral chamber, vague wisps of whiteness broke the vacant dome of heaven.

The pinewoods, that stretch densely north in serried undulations, still banked the mighty blackness with their motionless immensities of gloom, but high above them, far before them, the victorious dayspring, like a rising river, irresistible, spread across the fading firmament its promise of the morn.

Beneath these frigid glories of the twilight the noiseless shadows seemed to sink unseen into the soil. Then, all at once, the brightness from on high fell, like a loosened robe, along the blackness down below. For the climbing beams

had reached and struck the snow-lit stretch of valley: it lay revealed before the untender day, with sudden quivers swiftly passing over it, as of regretful longing for the comfortable dark. Upon the lowest rim of heaven the sullen sun stood watching.

Dorothea opened her eyes. In the clearness that spread cold about her muslin-curtained window, the first weak rays hung, like a lover's glances, caught. Half asleep, she lay back, awaiting the uncertain moment when those timid messengers that fumbled at her casement would break through every obstacle and, clinging to vague outlines in the greyness, fill all their broadening pathway with a silver mist. In that unequal contest the mild sympathies of healthful laziness are all enlisted on the losing side. For, when first the voiceless morning enters, night and sleep combine their dense resistance, pressing forward to outcloud him, sinking back, with dogged silence, into all the yet uncaptured corners of the room. But behold, the dimness takes familiar shape and colour: the relentless conqueror, gliding towards the helpful radiance of the sheeny bed and pillows, drives before him, as a breath of wind might chase the summer cloudlets, all the failing forces of the long-lived, frost-bound gloom. In heavy folds of snow-hushed sloth man and nature seem entangled, lying prone. Outside, the drowsing earth, with half-closed eyelids, shivers in mighty stretchings of brown flanks beneath an insufficient covering. Inside, a hundred friendly objects step forth from ancient hiding-places, as men that were in ambush, and wait.

Dorothea sat up in bed, and a sigh of fellow-feeling with all the unwilling universe ran slowly along her lissom limbs.

"After all, this is *my* day," said Dorothea. "Everybody can't be born in June."

She lingered for a moment, tenderly thoughtful, on the bedside, her fair hair in a flood about her shoulders, her night-robe sinking to the floor. Her eyes were fixed upon a woman's faded portrait that mildly gazed towards her from the wall. "Yours and mine," she added in a whisper. She might have cried the words aloud, for there is no response.

She went forward to the window and stood looking out. One bare arm, down which the sleeve had fallen to the elbow, held up the flimsy curtain, while her awakening

gaze embraced the raw, unready day. She turned away, with an impatient jerk, for youth still ever deems it has a right, even in frost and snow, to floods of sunshine: she turned away and faced her own tall figure, rising, gold-encircled, like a mermaid, from the glass. She shook back the shining torrent from her temples, making a sudden radiance in the half-dark of the room.

"Dorothea, don't be stupid!" she said aloud. "Why, last birthday it rained!" She had acquired this foolish habit of communing with herself aloud, for her simple youth had passed enclosed in a group of grown-up people, and a child, amongst grown-up people, lives alone.

She dressed herself now with careful haste. The fresh water rippled and broke all about her, as she poised, a roseleaf Naiad! on the azure surface of her saucer-bath: the next moment, see, it was Venus, the Anadyomene, who, deserting the blue depths that twinkled beneath her, ascended, enfolded in shaggy white foam like a cloud! The curtain falls rapidly over the scene, lest Peeping Tom should laugh!

Dorothea Sandring was not by nature sentimental, yet on this birthday morning her grey eyes strayed repeatedly to the pale water-colour against the wall, the while she threaded her reflective way through that small maze of daily intricacies which must combine to form the simplest woman's toilet. They strayed, those solemn eyes of hers, untouched, from the bright mirror, so pleasingly responsive, before which she stood coiling her golden wealth of hair. She was twenty-one to-day. At that age a good woman glances at the glass. She does not begin to gaze till the wrinkles begin to show.

Dorothea was not by nature sentimental, but her gentle youth had early been tuned to serious thoughts upon this birthday morning. For the dawn that had conferred upon her the fair gift of existence, had withdrawn it from another: she had met, and passed, her mother's soul at the threshold of the world. Years ago, when still a lisping infant, she had asked the aunts whose brightness lapped her childhood in all the loves and fancies that flower about pure women—stopping abruptly in her play with the shiny new toys, a white muslin, blue-ribboned, yellow-curled dot on the carpet, she had lifted aloft a fierce picture-book, full of multi-colour angels, and had asked the smiling aunts:

"My birthday's the day I came here?"

"Yes, darling, yes—four years ago," said the aunts, beaming, stiff and straight, from both sides of the fireplace.

"Then, auntie Mary, to-day must be mother's birthday in heaven?"

"Yes, darling," answered aunt Mary, softly, for she it was spoke of mother to Dorothea.

"And do the sing-sing angels bring her toys?"

"Grown-up people don't have toys, Dorothea."

Aunt Mary went across and kissed her curly baby.

"They have living toys," she said, and nodded to aunt Emma.

Sad as must seem the conception of a toyless festival—but then, countless are the woes of the children's heaven—the idea of this double celebration puzzled itself deep into little Dorothea's brain. The day became, in its exact recurrence, the steadfast link between the child and her dead. For it was the one slight scrap of time they owned in common, the one brief point in which their estranged lives met and touched.

"Auntie Mary, tell me, have I never seen mother since then?" Dorothea was a few years older and had begun those mental wriggings which men have graced with the name of reason.

"Except when, dear child? You know, you have never——"

"Except when I was born?"

"God bless the poor darling!—yes. No, I mean—that is to say, I——" But Dorothea was no longer listening, and aunt Mary wisely stopped.

At last the small creature heaved a long sigh. "Oh, *such* a pity!" she said, "I can't remember."

Then aunt Mary unconsciously leaped a great leap. For she knew many things that wise people do not. "Mother can," she said.

Dorothea, implicitly believing these words, understood that her childish soul and the soul whose life was nearest her own had in one most unutterably solemn moment faced each other, corporeally, eye to eye. Then that other soul, of which aunt Mary so often spoke in a Sunday hush, had passed into some other world, for ever, and Dorothea's gaze struck cold against the portrait on the wall.

"It's our birthday," she had said stoutly, in short frocks. And her aunts had let her say: they were the

last to dull the little sparkles that light up the earthly road. But they had laughed at the child for asking if any one else had ever been born on the thirteenth of December? That joke had stood against her in the cheerful household, where the smallest jokes thrive best.

"This, as you know, is Dorothea's especial birthday," said aunt Emma, archly. "Nobody would ever have ventured to be born on the same day as she."

"Don't, aunt Emma; you know I can't bear being teased."

"Alas, poor dear!" exclaimed aunt Emma in her favourite philosophic attitude. "Alas, poor dear! then you ought to have been born a man!"

"Please, what do you mean, aunt Emma?"

Dorothea seldom understood her younger aunt, when that aunt was serious. Aunt Emma was the humorous and playful element in her existence, a creature to romp and laugh with in the childish days when both were young.

"Aunt Emma means a 'boy,' dear," said aunt Mary. "Little boys tease little girls."

"And big boys, big girls!" cried Emma rebelliously. For Emma's heart, as all about her knew, had suffered much.

"Ma chère!" protested Mary. Dorothea's tiny ears had long ago caught the meaning of "Ma chère." It was aunt Mary scolding aunt Emma. She wished her own rebukings would take so concise a form.

"Yes, it is our own day, all to ourselves, our very own!" said Dorothea. "What do I care, if other people have it also, people I have never heard of—they don't share it with me? You and I, we share it, mother. We will keep it together in the early morning, before any one is stirring, to spy on us and interfere. Mother, you who see me up yonder, what would you say, could your daughter forget?" Ah, the terrible question! What do they say, when their children forget?

But Dorothea Sandring remembered. Every thirteenth of December, in that grim and grisly daybreak, which once had mingled a first breath with a final, before the noise of festivity and congratulation broke in upon her reveries, she had, in all simplicity, performed the self-appointed service of affection which now once more awaited her to-day.

She hurried down the creaking stairs, into the deserted hall. Countless inanimate objects watched her passage across the heavy winter light. On the hall-table lay the

gardener's yearly wreath of creamy lilacs and purple orchids, as if placed in readiness by unseen hands. Not a soul was in sight. So she had asked to have it, a happy child of twelve. She took the flowers and opened the great hall-door.

The rawness of the Dutch December morning struck her full in the face. She shuddered, and then, as quickly, smiled. Before her stretched the wide expanse of park, black, with a scattered lace-work of snow all over it, like a great, untidy quilt. In the distance shreds of crimson still hung here and there against a gleaming sky. She set off, walking briskly, down unequal by-paths, towards the low-sunk spire that trembled in the haze.

As the rusty gate swung back upon its hinges, she put out a hasty hand, lest the shriek which she knew so well should strike on the silence around. In the village churchyard, where the dead heed change nor season, that morning's sluggish awakening had awakened nothing at all. Nature, who often seems so painfully alive in graveyards, was fast asleep. And the snow lay thicker here, unmoved and soundless, about the staring headstones. Stay, if you looked, the headstones were awake. They never close an eye, from morn till eve, nor through all the lonely moonlight; telling their unending story, that means nothing or means everything, over and over again, then bidding you pass and forget. In Memory. Bidding you pass and forget.

Dorothea remembered. She stood before the single marble cross that rises among humbler tokens—a pure white marble cross, but slightly tinged by time:

Here Repozeth

In Hope of the Blessed RÉsurrection

DOROTHEA, BARONESS VAN BRODRYCK

Dearly Beloved Wife of Captain Lewis Foye Sandring,

Who died at Brodryck, Dec. 13th, 18—,

Aged 22 yrs. and 4 mths.

"Blessed are the Pure in Heart; for they shall see God."

Dorothea bent, to lay her flowers upon the stone and lightly brushed aside a few damp flakes of snow.

A crow, who had no particular connection with the

churchyard, but probably liked its listening depths of stillness, broke, from his gaunt black branch of beech, into a hideous caw. Dorothea started, looked up, and nodded to the crow.

Her eyes had already twice sought the little wicket that leads into the parsonage garden. Now, lingering, step by step, she began to retrace her path. For she vainly awaited the old parson's coming, whose annual privilege it had been, this many a year, to meet her as she wended on her homeward way, and bring her his good wishes, that were a benediction, before she faced her own adoring world. The minister's brow was young, beneath its crown of glory: the minister's heart was soft, beneath its Geneva bands.

So she had forgiven him his first intrusion, which had come unsought by either. Long before any one had ever dreamed of little Dorothy Sandring, the village pastor had daily sought the early repose of the village graveyard, close beside his parsonage: was it, then, his fault, if he happened, one midwinter morning, on a little girl who desired to be alone? In dismay he crept aside, whereon she, with a burst of gratitude, ran after him, crying out that this day was her birthday, and bidding him wish her many happy returns! He stood for a moment, looking straight into her eyes. "God bless you," he said, and walked away, feeling that the situation called for no further comment or converse. Did she feel it too? She was a small child. From that day she and the grave minister were intimate friends. Year after year he had waited by the wicket to greet her as she came away. There was no one thus waiting there now.

But a few yards within the lane, among the snow-splashed laurels, Mark Lester met her, the minister's student son. She started back, resenting his unseemly presence there.

"Father sent me," said Mark Lester quickly. "His chest is so bad, he dared not come out himself. He was afraid you might wait for him. He's written you his birthday wish."

"Thank you," said Dorothea, taking the proffered envelope. "I'm sorry you had to trouble, Mark."

"Father bade me," answered the young man simply. Dorothea felt that her tone had not been as kind as her intention.

"It was very good of you to come," she added. A smile came over his thin and proudly featured face, the face of such as greatly suffer—and enjoy.

"If I also congratulate you," he said, "please do not trouble to say 'thank you' again. It is hardly necessary."

"I won't. What made you come over from Leyden last night, Mark? You weren't expected. It wasn't to wish me many happy returns?" She laughed.

"No," replied the student brusquely, "I wanted a talk with my father: well, I've had it." He kicked, with his nervous foot, at a clumsy lump of snow. It crumbled a little, unmoved, and he fiercely, and vainly, kicked harder.

Dorothea was silent: the ripple of banter had all died away from her face.

"I am going back to college at once," said Mark. "Father desires it. Of course I shall come over at Christmas and help you, as usual, with your tree."

"Of course you will. I have some new ideas—good, I think—for the tree. Mark, I hope you like college better than you did at first."

The lad, who had turned beside her, pacing up the churchyard path again, took a few great strides without replying. Then he answered, in the voice that comes to men when they utter words they are longing not to speak.

"I loathe it."

The stupid crow, on his seat of desolation, laughed.

"Look here, Dorothea! you're a girl, and a good girl—Oh, you know I can't pay compliments!—what's the use of talking to you about young men's lives? You need hear nothing about them, God be thanked! I'm not better than others, God knows, only—only—I suppose I'm different. I loathe the whole stupid life at the University. And I'm going back: that's enough." He threw up his head and bit his lips: his keen profile—something like Schiller's—stood out against the fallow air.

For full ten seconds she walked beside him. Then she said softly: "Can't I help you—somehow—Mark, without your telling? We've known each other all our lives, and I've pulled out a lot of thorns for you, and splinters, formerly."

He threw up his head no more, but still he bit his lips.

"You always said that none of your sisters could pull

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out a thorn like I did. And you know you were that of boy, Mark: you were always getting thorns into ⁱⁿ somewhere."

"Some people do," said Mark, laughing. "They're made that way."

"It's the people who want to pick roses," replied Dorothea quickly. "Many are quite content to leave roses, and thorns, alone."

"I fear I got *my* thorns breaking through hedges."

"Well, I suppose *that* is some people's mission, to break through hedges and get hurt."

"Stealing apples?"

"Mark, please, I have *quite* come to the end of my metaphor. But I don't believe you ever stole an apple. However, being always happy myself, I should like to see you happy. And I have my doubts."

"I wanted to be off to the Colonies," he began suddenly. "I fancy I should have made my way. Oh, in anything—not business—teaching, for instance—travelling. I can live on sixpence a day. But it's not to be. I'm to stay at home and become a parson, here at Brodryck, some day, like father. Poor old father cried. Don't look at me like that, Dorothea. I couldn't help it. You see that you wouldn't understand."

"Oh, Mark, I'm sure I'm not looking 'like that.'"

"'If only I live long enough to see that day!' says father, 'Lord, then lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace!'" He stopped in the middle of the path. "Well, what could I do?" he said. "Of course the servant has got to depart in peace."

"Oh, Mark!"

The tears stood in his eyes. "If I didn't love the dear old dad with all my heart and soul," he said, "do you think I would sacrifice my life like this? It's worse, ten times worse, than dying, to consent to live a lie. I shouldn't have come out to you: I'm not fit. I haven't slept for two nights. If only he'd let me go as a missionary I don't think I should mind so much. Of course the lie'd be the same, but I should think it sounds different out there. To stop here, to go on, all your easy life, preaching to baptised Christians a religion of which they never, in practice, make true a single word! Lightly preaching condemnation upon yourself and upon them!"

"But, Mark, if we seek to believe?—"

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"It ^{camp} In what? In the Christianity of a Christian University, Christian Undergraduates, Christian Professors? In the Christianity of a Christian Church, Christian clergy and communicants: a Christian Society, a Christian State? Oh, Dorothea! there is no escape from the dilemma: either Christendom is a lie, or Christ!" For a moment his slender figure trembled. "You must forgive me," he added more calmly. "Indeed, I should not have come out. In a couple of hours I am going back to Leyden—to continue the study of divinity. There it stands, all the world over, the Christian college, with its smug professors, its dirty disciples. I am going back: that is enough. Good-bye." He held her hand in his, as they stood, the young pair of them, beside the marble cross.

"The pure in heart!" he murmured, and his eyes rested gently upon his companion's troubled face. "Why, Dorothea," he added brightly, "there's not a year's difference between you and me." And he dropped the hand.

"No," replied Dorothea. "Do you not think, dear Mark, that both you and I might wait a bit before definitely making up our minds about this wicked world?"

"Oh, a woman!" he answered impatiently. "Her life just comes to her! She needn't make up her mind at all!"

"By the tone of your voice one would almost conclude that you think she has none to make up?"

"You know better, Dorothea. But look at your own case. Your life all comes to you naturally, as it should. You'll stop in this place until—perhaps you'll always stop here. While I—I have to decide my whole future to-day."

She gazed across the dear, bleak landscape, the brown old village church, the fields, the leafless beeches. "That is true," she said; "our lives are simpler. Sometimes I think mine is shockingly simple and happy. I am almost ashamed. Still, I am not a sort of inverted Job, Mark, from whom God has told the Devil to keep *always* away." She followed the downcast gaze of his eyes, and, fancying she read his thoughts: "It does seem a pity," she said, "to bring such fragile blossoms here to die. I have often told the gardener to give me others, but he always selects his best."

"The strongest would last an hour longer," he answered. "If these felt anything, they would rejoice in such special service and speedy death. Surely it is better than any hot-house existence to do something quickly and die!"

"Mark," she said, "you have left me behind you—in the hot-house. You are twice as old as you were six months ago."

"Just now you informed me I was too young, Dorothea. Like a woman, you are inconsistent, and right. I'm too young at this moment, and too old. But, oh, Dorothea, when a man is just fresh from my yesterday's experience, when he's been taking up his whole little life—all he's got—into his hands, and looking at it—dreaming of what he might do with it—wings, far-away flights, and balloons!—and when he has just put it down again into the heavy cart between the clogging ruts, all splashing and straining—gee up!—Oh, Dorothea, if he happens on his best friend at that moment—and she a woman!—he may be forgiven if he turn a bit melodramatic, for a change."

"I do not think you are melodramatic, Mark."

"Well, I'm good again now, please. Quite good. Melodrama would ill suit the future dominie of Brodryck."

"Once you seemed to like the idea of your life-task."

"I don't think so. I endured it. My year in the big world has changed me. If ever you get *outside*—"

"Well?"

"You never will. Here we are at the gate again. What an aimless walk we have had—to and fro. You might have been home by this time. Good-bye till Christmas. Good-bye." He turned, on the other side of the little wicket. "If this frost holds," he added, "we shall get some splendid skating!" His eyes kindled suddenly with coming delights. It was thus she remembered him afterwards; and she remembered her reply:

"If the frost holds, Mark, we must take that long-planned trip along the Rhine."

As he strode down the laurel-walk, he meditatively pulled at the bushes. "Thank God she doesn't care for me," he said to himself, but his tone was far from grateful.

Dorothea, meanwhile, hurried home through the park, back to her own small garden entrance. Even now the hour was still very early, barely half-past eight. The sun had turned to a flaming golden red, upon a pearly pedestal. Trillions of tiny diamonds sparkled on every inch of ground, on every twig and every breath of air. The glittering snow about her feet broke in prismatic glories, a very path of diamonds. A flight of pigeons—her own—wheeled, whirring, down across a glaucous break of moss. •

The flaxen children at the cottage stood in a bobbing row. "We felicitate the noble young lady!" they said, or that, at least, should have been the burden of their tuneless murmur. She nodded to each one of them. "Are you coming up to say your verses?" she asked. Each was a special friend of hers, even the one with the unwiped nose. Every face, every bush, every curve of the path was familiar. That gaitered old gentleman plodding up the avenue, with the two brown setters behind him, was uncle Tony.

He heard the brisk crunch of her footsteps and turned to wait. A hale old gentleman, white-haired and clean shaven, with the flesh-tints of a farmer and the features of a Bourbon. Not really an uncle of Dorothea's, her mother's cousin, but too near a friend and neighbour not long ago to have merited the dearer appellation. Uncle Tony was supposed to have broken his healthy heart, years ago, for aunt Emma, who had suffered so much herself, as all knew, from the fickleness of Man. The fable, and joke, of his constancy had grown with the whitening of his hairs. He now frequently proposed to her in public, and neither the lady nor her suitor had ever been quite certain in how far he once may have meant what he said. He always declared, as in chivalry bound, that he had found her adamant. "And if I've gone to the dogs," he would add, "it's Emma alone that's to blame." The dogs in question were "Em" and "Doll," the two setters, sole ornaments, he averred, of his heart and his home. He solemnly made these statements in the very loud voice which was part of his character, but which affords no proof of his sincerity. Then he would potter across to the couple of expectant quadrupeds and gently stroke them down the nose. "Two old Irish setters," he would say, his protuberant eyes fixed full on their responsive ones, and perhaps the dogs would slowly move their beautiful auburn tails. "Old they may be," shouted uncle Tony, "I'm not denying it: they'll be thirteen, the pair of them, come next Michaelmas—God willing!" he interjected, with a sudden hush of reverence—"but there's not a better brute than Em or Doll, for their sort of work, in all the province—in all the blessed kingdom!" The chandelier rang.

"You shouldn't swear," said aunt Mary softly.

"H'm, h'm, you are right, my dear. A man should be a saint to live with so good a woman as you, Mary. And,

oh dear me!" Uncle Tony sat down, slapped his thigh, and expressively shook his head.

"Em" crept forward, and pushed her sympathetic nose into her master's palm. The firelight filled with radiance the russet splendours of her coat.

"She's a handsomer ornament to your hearth, Antony, than ever I could have been," remarked Emma, who always made a point of giving her cousin his full baptismal name. And she sighed for thought of that other man who had brought her occasional flowers, and married (she declared) her ugliest friend.

"Well—you'd have been more talkative, Emma. Not but that the dogs have plenty to tell me, God knows."

"Again!" remonstrated aunt Mary, and held up a finger in smiling reproof.

"My dear, you are right," said the old gentleman affably. "But when a man has a poor conception of his own judgment, it comes so handy to appeal to a higher!" His auditors could not help smiling. Uncle Tony was a self-developed philosopher, an authority on all matters agricultural, products and prices, and an indefatigable Nimrod. He had named the two promising pups after two of the creatures he most heartily admired in a world that was full of disappointments and petty impurities: poaching, adulterated butter, tinned pork, American grain.

"I am sorry there isn't one left for you, Mary," he had said, as he stood peering at the litter, his elder cousin by his side.

"Thank you, Tony."

"I had made up my mind to have you all."

"It can't be helped," said Mary.

"You see, the third has got the distemper. You wouldn't like to have a dog called after you that had got the distemper, Mary?"

"I don't know," answered Mary dubiously, for her heart went out with ready sympathy to the poor little invalid, blind and half sick, in his straw at the lodge.

Uncle Tony stared at her till his surprise found vent in a whistle. "Well!" he said, "there's no accounting for tastes. Besides, Mary, I—somehow, I think, you're too good to have a dog called after you." And he walked away, coughing very loud.

It was this good-natured and testy, this philosophic and irrational, old gentleman who greeted Dorothea.

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"Up so early? Is this in my honour, uncle Tony?"

"My dear, the honour is mine." He swept his brown velvet cap to the ground. Uncle Tony's etiquette was that of the monarchs he facially resembled. "It had to be early or not at all. Business of yours, Dorothea, as usual. A sale of timber. In the Holtham woods. It will keep me occupied all day." He sighed, with visible satisfaction.

"Have I so much business, uncle Tony? All your life seems to go, poor dear, in this endless business of mine."

"It can't be helped, my child: there's nobody else to take the weight off my shoulders." Uncle Tony fairly laughed with delight. "You can't keep from taking up what comes to your hand, you know, as Tim the Poacher answered when I found him making off with my pheasant, that had fallen on his side of the hedge."

"And to think that I should be so ungrateful! When I saw you up already, I said to myself: Uncle Tony would never get up so early, unless to go shooting hares!"

"Do people shoot hares in the snow? Dorothea, you have *no* sporting instincts! I have always deemed *that* a calamity in one who"—uncle Tony's voice grew impressive—"will one day own, God willing, the finest snipe-shooting in this province." He paused and gazed sadly at his ward. The dogs gazed too: their faces were the more reproachful.

"When I am mistress of Brodryck," replied Dorothea with great decision, "not a shot shall fall on the estate."

Uncle Tony's sad expression broke into a rude grin. "And your husband, my dear?" he said. "How about the corn-fields? And the orchards? Come, take my arm, O patroness of poachers! I hope to be invited, Dorothea, many a time, by—him."

"Uncle Tony, you are very wicked."

"Comparatively—yes," replied the old gentleman complacently.

"And because you are wicked, there is something I want to ask you. Now, please, uncle Tony, be very serious. You have seen the world—is it very bad?"

"Most certainly not," replied Tony with vehemence. "Are your aunts bad? Am I?—whew! I forgot!"

"Please, uncle Tony, I want you to be serious. You know the world; I don't." The old man smiled. "When you were at Leyden in your youth, was life there very horrid?"

"Horrid?" The old man's voice rang out across the summits of the trees. Then it grew suddenly gentle. "Oh, Dorothea!" he said, "none of us can be young more than once." He walked on, gazing in front of him.

"But afterwards, then," she persisted. "The big world, the—you know very well what I mean," she impatiently slapped his arm, "is it the sort of thing one—loathes?" He bent to catch the whispered word.

"Now this is parsons' stuff," said uncle Tony. "You're fresh from parson, child. The whole world lieth in wickedness. Rubbish!"

"Oh, uncle, that's a Bible text!"

Uncle Tony stared, aghast. "Well, they must have got the translation wrong," he said at last, "or we've greatly improved since Bible times. That's it, of course," he added, greatly relieved. "And no wonder, after eighteen centuries of the true religion. Depend on it, child, the world's all right to-day."

"Uncle Tony, I don't believe you know."

The old gentleman bridled. "I know *plenty*," he said, "a great deal more than you ever will. I'm not denying there's a certain amount of evil. All I say is, there's far more good. It just depends which side one looks. A man naturally turns both ways, but the woman who discovers the world is *bad* must have found it out for herself, dear."

"And if a man opens the shutters for her on the bad side, uncle?"

"God forgive him and have mercy on her," said uncle Tony. After that they walked on to the house in silence. "Farewell, my dear," said uncle Tony, "I've no time to go in. Enjoy your birthday. I must drive seven miles in the cold."

He turned back, abusing the ill-luck which had altered the day of the sale. Everything in his life, he knew, invariably fell awry. He had started upside-down, he said, for his romantic mother, fresh from that endless old novel "*Cléopâtre*," had wished to call her son "*Mark Antony*," and his practical father, mindful of rich uncle Anthony in Amsterdam, had accepted the two names, only, as they now stood, absurdly inverted. The Amsterdam uncle, dying, had left Antony Mark a bundle of American confederate securities: that, also, surely was a big upset. And all his love affairs with cousin Emma, of which neither could ever unravel the meaning: these also were only a tangled skein.

The whole of his life fell topsy-turvy. In spite of the numerous misfortunes to which he enjoyed frequent and pathetic allusion, his health remained excellent; he thoroughly delighted in his dinner and his shooting; he endured a rather terrible maid, of whom later, with equanimity—in fact, he was far happier than he felt that he need have been. His philosophy also, whenever he considered it his duty to decry things, had an unreasonable habit, perhaps not unusual, of twisting right side up!

CHAPTER II.

DOROTHEA entered the house. Ever since her birth, her mother's death, her father's departure, she had lived, as an orphan; with the aunts, who were her dead mother's step-sisters, in the roomy, green-trellised, whitewashed dwelling that her grandfather had built for his step-daughters. This sunshiny residence stood on the confines of the park, whose statelier mansion would one day open lofty doors to welcome the youthful heiress. Dorothea knew the big, desolate house was hers, but of wealth, and its meaning, she knew nothing.

She passed now into the hall of "Rose Villa" and immediately paused, in dismay. For the first time in nearly a dozen years the two aunts had not run out to greet her. One of them must surely be ill?—yet neither had ever been known to keep her room before, though aunt Emma, if you believed her, endured frequent smiling martyrdoms with a fortitude only equalled by the Spartan hero of the fox. "Bonjour!" shrieked aunt Emma's parrot in the unaccustomed silence, and, getting no answer, he yelled the one word without ceasing, according to his parrotty wont. "Bonjour, Bonjour, Bob," replied Dorothea, "I am just a spoilt child, like you." But his cries sounded horribly shrill in this inexplicable birthday silence, and she hastily opened the dining-room door.

The light, many-windowed apartment wore its expected air of festivity, gay with flowers and greenery about Dorothea's familiar seat. And both aunts were there also, God bless them!—they sat, each on her side of the fireplace, immovable in her especial uneasy easy-chair. They sat, watching Dorothea enter, silent, their flushed faces marked with deepest dejection. Presently they both smiled, but that was useless. Cats lay about everywhere, as usual: a bulging black one dozed in aunt Emma's lap, and, whenever the lady's feelings got too much for her, she rumbled its

fur, and its purring stopped. Aunt Mary had a book of family devotions on her knees, and a Bible: with a hand that grasped firmly an open letter, she rustled the pages of these books to and fro, pretending to look out the portions for the day.

"Mary!" said aunt Emma in shrill accents, very unlike her habitual murmur of chastened regret.

"Yes, Emma dear," replied aunt Mary more calmly, suddenly engrossed in the finding, for the third time, of the seventh of St. John.

"Dorothea has come in!"

"Yes, I see her." Aunt Mary's eyes rose over their spectacles. "My dear child, we have something we wish to tell you. Your aunt Emma feels——"

"I!" exclaimed Emma, indignantly rising, and dropping her cat. "Feels!" she sniffed scornfully, and sat down again on the quadruped, who had slipped up, behind, on her chair.

"I was going to say you preferred me to speak," continued aunt Mary mildly. "Dear Dorothea, we know it is our duty——"

"To congratulate you heartily on your birthday," interrupted aunt Emma, resuming her tabby, "and to wish you many happy—oh, far happier!—returns of the day." She began stroking vigorously.

"To congratulate you, oh, most certainly," continued aunt Mary, in a curious voice, "but I think we had better tell you——"

"Oh, Mary, one day more!" pleaded Emma.

Dorothea had drawn near; aunt Mary's books slipped down from her trembling hold and fell with a thud on the floor. "Oh dear, oh dear!" lamented aunt Mary, "to think that I've dropped the blessed Bible!" Dorothea hastily helped her to pick up the volume.

"Please, might I know at once what is wrong?" said the girl.

"Wrong, my child?" exclaimed Emma. "Why, it's your birthday! We're all very happy!" She burst into tears.

"Emma," said aunt Mary reproachfully. "What did we promise each other just now, when we left off?"

"If you cared as much as I do, you couldn't have left off," sobbed Emma. "There, my dear, there; I know it's not true. Dorothea, always remember, when you've

forgotten us, that aunt Mary was an angel born, and I but a poor, weak human, that needed a lot of love."

"Aunt Mary, tell me quick," said Dorothea, in white dismay.

Aunt Mary rose up, very hard and stiff. "My dear, you are right," she said, "our behaviour is cruel, and foolish. Forgive us. The first post has brought us a letter from your father. He has timed it wonderfully well."

"He was always so clever about that," answered Dorothea nervously, "even about sending his presents from Africa——"

"His present this year——" began Emma bitterly.

"Oh, Dorothea," cried Mary, "he wants you back."

"Back!" repeated Dorothea. Her eyes sank swiftly to the carpet. "I do not even know him," she said.

"But you know a great deal about him. We have always been careful about that. It will not be like going to a stranger. You love him!" insisted aunt Mary rapidly.

The girl did not lift her eyes. "You have told me what little you could, I suppose," she said. "Why, you hardly know him yourselves."

They were all silent for a moment. Tib, the white kitten, in aunt Mary's chair, made a great noise licking herself.

Then Dorothea looked up. "Yes, you have taught me to love him," she said, with slow conscientiousness. "Of course I shall be glad to make my father's acquaintance. And then I shall come back here."

"No, he will never let you come back," sobbed Emma.

Aunt Mary took her niece's hand. "Who knows?" said aunt Mary wistfully.

"It would never be the same," replied Emma. "Oh, far better not to come back!" She put up her pocket-handkerchief.

Aunt Mary pressed the hand she held. "When your mother died," she said, "just twenty-one years ago this very morning, your English father was broken-hearted." She turned almost angrily on Emma. "Was broken-hearted!" she repeated, raising her voice.

"I never denied it," said Emma.

"He had loved our sister dearly," continued Mary, staring very hard at Emma's face.

"Oh, certainly," assented Emma. "Oh, of course." She

sat noisily smoothing her gown. The aunts always came down to breakfast on Dorothea's birthday in their second-best Sunday silks.

"Intensely," insisted Mary.

"As men go," said Emma.

"Passionately!" cried Mary.

"Indeed? I have no experience of such matters," retorted Emma. "Have you?"

Gentle aunt Mary coloured. "He volunteered immediately for active service in India. Afterwards he went to Africa. He has fought in many battles, under various flags. Meanwhile he left you with us. Naturally. His was a soldier's existence. He is very brave."

"With masculine bravery!" cried Emma.

"He is now, as you know, a colonel. His breast is covered with medals. Once or twice he has paid flying visits to London or Paris in the course of his——"

"Adventurous," suggested Emma.

"Career," cried aunt Mary. "On these occasions it was deemed most expedient by all of us——" She looked across at her sister.

"Oh, you needn't appeal to me," exclaimed Emma, ruffled. "I agree beforehand with each word you may say."

"That the tranquillity of your life here should not be disturbed by a meeting which could only have lasted an hour or two at most, and might easily have left but erroneous impressions. Still, it was always understood that, as soon as your father should settle in Europe——"

"Just so—settle—settle," cried aunt Emma, fanning herself with Tab's tail.

"You would go to him. You have always known that, Dorothea. I suppose we have known it. He says we had fixed the age of twenty-one. I cannot remember that. Why twenty-one? I fear we had built almost sinful hopes on his never settling down."

"Nor has he settled down!" declared Emma with vehemence. "Dorothea, instantly say that you have been happy with us."

Dorothea gazed from one dear creature to the other, and back again.

"But you love your father," insisted aunt Mary. "See how kindly he writes." She held out the letter, taking it from where it lay crunched by her little black bag.

"'My dear Mademoiselle de Torby.'"

"Cold," said aunt Emma.

"Correct," said aunt Mary. "Why, we barely know him, sister."

"Enough to praise him, it appears!" viciously responded Emma.

Mary went and put her arm around her sister's neck. "Do not let us destroy in a moment the work of a lifetime," she whispered.

Meanwhile Dorothea read the Colonel's letter aloud: "On the thirteenth of December next Dorothea will attain the age of twenty-one. I think you will bear me out that, according to our original arrangement, the time has now come for her to join her father. I am growing old, and my travelling days are well-nigh over——"

"That's America, he means, not Heaven!" interrupted Aunt Emma, wildly.

"I am greatly pleased at the thought of my daughter's companionship, and have been waiting impatiently for this all-important day to arrive. Never shall I be able to thank you and your sister sufficiently for all you have been to my motherless bairn——"

"We must look up that word in the dictionary," interpolated Emma.

"Ah me, it explains itself," sighed Mary.

"I am going to spend a few months on the Riviera. There could be no better place, as it seems to me, for an experiment which, if successful (and doubtless it will be), must develop into a permanent re-union."

"He calls it a re-union," said Emma.

"I have been putting off writing day by day, in hopes that you would broach the difficult subject; yet, on the other hand, I can well understand your preferring me to begin, lest it should look as if you wanted to get rid of my girl."

"Yes, he says that," gasped aunt Mary.

"But, in any case, I have now delayed too long. I shall put off my departure, at considerable inconvenience, as I presume you may desire Dorothea to spend this last birthday at Brodryck. Would it suit you, if she joined me in Paris two days later? I shall write further as soon as I have heard from you ——" Dorothea paused and took up the envelope from the floor.

"This was written very nearly a month ago," she

said. "It has been to a Utrecht in New England—look!"

"It ought to have stayed there," cried Emma.

"Now that explains everything," said Mary, wiping her misty spectacles. "Your father forgot to put 'Holland.'" And Mary contentedly shook her head. She did not much mind the discovery that people had been careless, or stupid, or even inconsiderate. These things were natural. What she disliked was to learn that any one on earth could be cruel, or wicked, or unkind.

"It explains nothing at all," said aunt Emma. "Explain it away! Explain it away to America! Make that thing yonder"—she pointed to the paper in Dorothea's hand—"vanish, disappear, get itself read by some person it belongs to in New England! Pish! Send it back to New York!"

The clock struck nine. At the first stroke aunt Mary started. "The servants will be waiting for prayers," she said.

"Prayers? Is this a time for prayers?" cried Emma.

"Indeed it is," answered aunt Mary gravely. She walked to the window and stood looking out. When she turned, her face was very serene. "Call them in, Dorothea, please," she said; and she read the simple service through, with only a falter here and there.

"In all time of our tribulation, in all time of our joy, do Thou remember us, Lord!"

After the auditory had filed from the room again, the sacred words still seemed to linger on the air. They brought a troubled calm with them, as of waves that are sinking to rest.

"Dorothea, dear, look at your presents," suggested aunt Mary. But Dorothea, sinking her face on the hand which still held the letter, gave way to a fit of weeping that shook her from head to foot. She crept away to her own chamber. "Bonjour! Bonjour!" called the parrot along the passage. The words followed her like a farewell.

Aunt Emma flung herself straight into aunt Mary's arms. "Oh, Mary, you love her as much as I do! More, if possible, but it isn't possible! We can't live without her. Our lives 'll be as empty as that envelope she's dropped on the floor!"

"Cheer up, Emma," expostulated Mary firmly, "there'll always be the missionaries in New Guinea! And I do hope they'll make a great many converts. Then, perhaps, we sha'n't mind so much!"

"Missionaries!" cried Emma, "what are missionaries?—great hulking, lazy fellows that do nothing at all! How many missionaries aren't there in South Africa, and not one of them's ever converted the Colonel!"

Caspar now considered it his duty to cough a second time. Perhaps the cough was partially needed to cover a squeak of surprise. For Caspar had learned much from his mistresses' lips without their knowing it, but his secret, and doubtless erroneous, opinion of parasite preachers, he had always believed to be entirely his own discovery. Personally, he did not object to callers in tall hats and chokers. Being a clever young man, he had organised a snug little commission agency in connection with these charity-mongers. First, there was an entrance fee (with a converse "Not at home"), and further you paid a percentage on subscriptions, progressive according to Caspar's discreet advocacy of your cause.

His father, after forty years of service, had retired on a pension, rum, and stories of the dead. To all the paternal privileges and dodges the son had succeeded, with power to add to their number, and he thus occupied, in his cheerful youth, the situation of an old retainer, which is well known to be as weighty for the possessor as it is burdensome to the—possessed. Nature and a closely cropped head of black hair had conferred on this healthy young man the boon of a delicate appearance, and the village doctor had done him the kindness of ascribing his baby sister's death to consumption, instead of measles. It is not in human nature to suppress an occasional tickle in your throat, when the tickle calls for doses—alas, homœopathic, but persistent as the tickle—of port wine.

"Caspar, do not stand in the draught!" said aunt Mary.

"How often have we told you not to wait by the door!" added Emma, her tartness not entirely ascribable to care of the cough. "I shall make you some more of your medicine at once." And she moved to the old-fashioned cabinet, in which she kept her new-fangled pills.

"It was Miss Mary's herb-tea cured me," replied the servant, with ready spite. The herb-tea needed a touch of brandy in it.

"You shall have a big bowl to-night," declared Miss Mary beaming, for Miss Emma's minuscule, three-syllable grains, and Miss Mary's Kneipp concoctions did battle over

the bodies of their various dependents, just as Miss Mary's tracts and Miss Emma's story-books contended for their souls. On these points, their sole possible danger of disagreement, so acute a rivalry existed between the sisters that many a villager, only too eager to get profitably converted, found himself in a quandary, how to satisfy both.

"The people are waiting downstairs," said Caspar, his eyes at rest. It was annoying, of course, not to know everything at once, but some secrets required time.

"We will come in five minutes," replied Dorothea's voice, and she closed the door upon his retreating figure.

"Don't, aunt Emma, please; I don't want to cry any more," she said. "If I am to go to Paris it is much better I should have to leave at once."

"Take a cup of tea," said aunt Mary, pouring it out. "We must send for uncle Tony."

"Uncle Tony is away for the day!" exclaimed Dorothea, whereupon aunt Emma pointed out that the worst misfortunes always befall us last. "Antony would have put everything right," she said, "for Antony is the wisest of men."

"Thomas must ride after him," suggested aunt Mary. "None of them will want to miss Dorothea's reception, but Thomas is the youngest: he has been with us only seven years."

"What can uncle Tony do?" asked Dorothea helplessly: and they went down to meet the little concourse of retainers who stood waiting, as usual, anxious to be received, and to receive.

The picturesque group of the peasants, in the quaintest of dresses, much black and much muslin, with a little dull gold here and there, some bright coral, a flaring silk neckerchief; the whole crowd smart, stiff, red and pink, scrubbed and shiny; the children, tight-fitted manikins in miniature, with great wooden shoes, crimson cheeks and blue eyes, like Delft saucers; the big mothers redolent of cleanliness, living symbols of soap: the fathers stolid, awkward, self-conscious—the crisp sunshine played pleasantly about all these, as they stood in the cheerful snow. Yet all the variegated colours of these fifty chequered friendships seemed suddenly in Dorothea's eyes to have been wiped away by a storm-cloud of uniform grey, and the sympathy she felt for their humble joys and sorrows was already an unreal sentiment that belonged to somebody

else. What did it matter to her that Joopie, the milk-maid's brother, had got that job in the garden at last? "He's to come on New Year's day," said Betsy, pouring forth pailfuls of gratitude, "and whenever you'll eat the new taters, Freule, they'll taste of our grateful hearts." What did it matter to her that the stableman's naughty Moppie was coming to Sunday School? "She's promised to be good," said Moppie's eager parent, pushing her daughter forward, "and her father has promised to beat her each time she don't learn her text. It took me a long time to make him promise, but at last he said he'd do it for love of you. Men have no religion, Freule." Dorothea looked from one smiling face to another. "You tell them, aunt Emma, I can't," she said, and ran half-way up the stairs. Then she peered over the banisters and saw them standing there, by the open door, the poor gentle, timid ladies with their kindly faces and kindly curls—aunt Emma rosy and coffee-coloured, aunt Mary sallow and grey—standing there half-distraught, always a little afraid of the people they ruled, and were ruled by—and with resolute step she came down again into the basement-hall.

"Friends, I am going away," she said, "for a long time, probably. I am going to my father."

The most satisfactory Sunday School child, the head of her class, lame Jenny, whom sickness had rendered reflective, immediately understood these last words to indicate the Freule's approaching dissolution, and broke into a heart-rending howl.

"I shall spend Christmas," continued Dorothea hastily, "with my father, Colonel Sandring."

A lubberly boy, contemptively sucking an orange, surprised his surroundings by dropping the fruit and howling still louder than Jenny.

"Poor child, he does love the Freule so!" explained his buxom mother. Murmurs arose on every side, for all present loved the Freule. The house servants held aloof, aggrieved at not having been told before the labourers were. "I knew last week," declared Caspar.

"Tommie's crying 'cos he thinks he won't get his Christmas toys," piped a shrill child's voice, and Tommie's little sister edged herself forwards. Her mother slapped her hastily aside.

"Boo-hoo-hoo, Christmas toys," repeated Tommie, and Tottie grinned amidst her tears.

"You will get your presents all the same," said Dorothea; but, to do them justice, they found little comfort in that fact. Consternation had fallen upon all. As they straggled away, in groups, they discoursed of this Colonel Sandring, a myth to the few that had heard of him, now suddenly grown a personal enemy of all.

Meanwhile, aunt Emma enthusiastically welcomed uncle Tony—"although, of course, you can do no good," she said.

Uncle Tony marched straight to the hearthrug, his two dogs trailing after him.

"So your father wants you back," said uncle Tony. "You are twenty-one to-day, my dear, and your father wants you back." He smiled, blew his nose with a great crimson handkerchief, and nodded to "Em." "Doll," seeing this, scratched his calf with a jealous paw.

"But why twenty-one?" cried the aunts together.

"Why, indeed?" asked uncle Tony. "What'll you bet me, my dears, that we'll have her back before she is twenty-two?"

"The Lord is mighty!" said Mary, and "A box of cigars," said Emma.

"Make it a wedding ring," suggested Tony.

"We have telegraphed, asking for delay," put in Dorothea.

"Well, you needn't have sent for me, then. This little disturbance means a loss of several hundreds to the property, but women never have any idea of business." Uncle Tony walked to the window and looked out, caged. "There is the telegraph boy," he said. Dorothea slipped away.

"Tony, you love money," said aunt Mary.

"I deny it. He loves business," cried Emma.

"I love money," answered Tony calmly, "for other people's sake. Dorothea's, for instance. Certainly not for Colonel Lewis Foye Sandring, Chevalier of twenty orders, that of industry, ever accorded the idle, among the rest."

"You do him flagrant injustice!" cried Mary, "a dozen scars——"

"And a hundred stains," said uncle Tony, shrugging his shoulders. "Here is the telegram. Well, Dorothea, what does your father say?"

"Regret further delay quite impossible," read Dorothea.

"Had written twice. Sleeper paid for. Can still get

Dorothea one. Wire immediately, Grand Hotel, Paris. Else could easily follow with maid to Nice. But why not come directly? Clothes Nice. Loving father."

"I could put that in fewer words, I am sure," said aunt Emma.

"Even 'loving father'?" asked Tony. But Emma did not answer, busy with her pencil on the telegram, for economy in others was a favourite subject with Emma.

"Tony dear, you will have to take her south?" suggested aunt Mary faintly.

The old gentleman gave such a bound that he nearly upset into the fire. "I've never left the country in my life," he cried, "I've never even ventured to Carlsbad, though the doctor declares I shall die unless I go! Business is business, Mary. I can't desert the property!"

"I had better start to-morrow," interposed Dorothea.

"Brave girl! Look here, I'll give you Rebecca."

"Your treasure!" exclaimed Emma. "Antony, if you send away Rebecca, I shall have to come and keep house for you myself."

"Done!" replied uncle Tony laughing.

Aunt Mary sat in contemplation of masculine goodness. "Rebecca!" she repeated.

"I also can rise to heights of sacrifice," added aunt Emma, but her suitor pretended not to hear.

"The trip will do the child a heap of good," he continued. "And, mark my words, we shall have her back with the birds in spring."

"I'll marry you on the day of her return," said Emma.

"You will make me the happiest of mortals, my dear; but allow me to point out that Rebecca will then also be home again."

All the way back to his house, on the solitary high road, uncle Tony walked doing interminable sums in his head. Big bursts of money rang, like gunshots, across the wintry air. "Twenty-five thousand!" he shouted, as he opened his gate. "Twenty!" he added, with conviction, as he fumbled with his latchkey at the door. In the hall, however, hearing Rebecca's familiar bark, he burst out laughing. Rebecca's cough was purely a bad habit, though *she* knew better: it was lungs. Uncle Tony yet chuckled in his arm-chair when the handmaid brought him his slippers, and something warmer still.

"Cough bad to-day?" asked the wily master.

"God made the weather," replied the guileless maid. Her tone certainly indicated disapproval of some one. She was a harsh-featured, fresh-coloured Dissenter, of plenteous utterance anent religion, especially the want of it in others. Her elder sister Sarah, who never coughed, had accompanied a sick mistress two winters ago, to the land of oranges and lemons, and since then Rebecca had lost no opportunity of lamenting, to her master, her own invalid lot.

"Undoubtedly He did," replied Tony with easy alacrity. "Still, you know, there are climates and climates. This climate is horrible!" Uncle Tony shuddered, and warmed his flower-embroidered feet.

"The healthy needn't mind it," retorted Rebecca, barking her loudest.

"It would do that cough of yours a lot of good, Rebecca, if you could get such a change of air as your sister Sarah had!"

Rebecca sheerly snorted in her scorn. "Some people get all the blessings!" she cried, "and some people——!" Snort.

"Deserve them. Just so. Well, you are one of those who get them. You are going to start to-morrow with the Freule Dorothea, to spend a few weeks in the South."

"I will never desert my dear master," said Rebecca, as soon as she could speak.

"Nonsense; Rachel can look after me."

"Rachel! She couldn't even look after a baby, let alone a ——"

"Well?"

"I can never desert my dear fatherland—I mean my dear master!" cried Rebecca, knotting and unknotting her nervous hands. "I can't go out alone, two defenceless females, into a country where Satan reigns supreme! Sarah says that in foreign parts the men as soon kiss you as look at you——"

"Sooner, I should think," said uncle Tony, meditatively stirring his glass.

"Huh?"

"Look here, I'll double your wages," said uncle Tony.

Rebecca's eyes glistened. "I won't go," she said.

"Well, of course, if you won't, you won't."

"How long shall we stay away?"

"You had better allow me six weeks."

"I'll do it," said Rebecca, "but not for the wages."

"Of course not. Do it for your health."

"I do it for the sake of that orphan," Rebecca barked, "and after six weeks I can do as I like?"

"You can!" shouted Tony in sudden anger. He impetuously spilt a splash of his grog. "You can stop there, if you like, with the 'orphan,' or—or go to the devil!"

"Thank you, sir; in that case I shall return to you," replied Rebecca calmly.

Aunt Mary rose from the painfully festive dinner. "Dorothea," she said, "it is time for our evening walk." Aunt Mary believed in constitutionals, while lively aunt Emma struggled fiercely with unwilling naps. Aunt Emma had read in some medical manual that sleep after dinner was conducive to long life. The writer's pen had slipped: he intended to say "before." Ten years later, aunt Emma, renewing her copy, found the error revised.

Dorothea went out with aunt Mary into the soft frost and gentle moonlight, softly treading the silvered snow between the starlit plains of earth and heaven. Neither uttered a word, or gave direction to the feet which led them towards the Manor House.

The deserted House of Brodryck lay, amongst its untrimmed gardens, about a mile from the ladies' humbler corner of the park. Dorothea's mother had dwelt three months in it. Since then it had lain deserted, mysterious with protracted solitude. Yet Dorothea knew its every corner, its every legend. She had quaked in its closets and shouted from its turrets, playing with the Lesters. She had stood, awe-struck, before a couple of hideous oil portraits and one lovely child-face. She had shaken frightened moths out of costly hangings, instantly bringing aunt Mary on the scene with charwomen and disinfectants. And on rare Sunday afternoons, wandering hither with auntie Mary, she had learnt, in the solemn room upstairs, the great lessons of her girlish life.

"Yes, let us go in!" said Dorothea softly. How still the night was in the calmly brilliant park! The house lay before them, looming grey.

The moonlight shone full into the upstairs room, a long, low bedroom, dark and old-fashioned, with panelling about a partially curtained bed.

"Come and sit beside me, on the window-seat, here in our corner," said aunt Mary, "Here Caspar cannot disturb us with 'the Widow So-and-So.'"

Dorothea nestled down. "Ah, that sounds like old times," she murmured, "and now I must answer: 'I've been naughty, auntie May, but I want to be good.'"

"You are never naughty now," said aunt Mary, with a lingering regret in her voice. "Oh, Dorothea, the world you are going into! I know there is wickedness enough in Brodryck—still! You are so ignorant, so innocent! I fear our education has been all wrong, but how could we have made it different? My heart is very heavy to-night."

"You have done everything for me, and I love you dearly," said Dorothea in a low voice. The light of the single lantern played about them as they clung together in the window-seat.

"Child, child, perhaps we have not done our duty. There is a confession I would like to make—must make, I hardly know how. Your father——" Her voice broke,

"Don't, aunt Mary," whispered Dorothea, squeezing the poor soul's hand till the fingers ached. "I fancied from something aunt Emma said this morning——" She fell back, with both arms outstretched as if to warn off an impending evil. "You have always taught me to honour and love him! Oh, please don't say anything now!"

Aunt Mary sat reflecting. Dorothea's breath came fast. "You must not mistake me," said aunt Mary at last. "Your father and I belong to different worlds, but I have never thought otherwise of him than in kindness. In this room, of all places, I would do him no wrong."

Dorothea sprang to her feet. "In this room in which my mother died," she cried, "tell me this: My father, as you have always told me, is a gentleman?"

"Yes."

"A brave soldier?"

"Yes, oh yes."

"Kindly—manly—generous?"

"Yes."

"He loved my mother?" Suddenly the girl stood still, full in the moonlight, in front of her aunt.

"Oh, Dorothea, what a question to put to me! I have always told you he was broken-hearted, when she died."

"I know nothing of these matters," said Dorothea slowly, "but it seems to me a man might not really love his wife, and yet be broken-hearted when she died." She flung herself into aunt Mary's arms. "Oh, forgive me," she said, "see, I am naughty already!"

"Dorothea, the world is very evil. You are going into much temptation——"

Dorothea looked up quickly. "You must say good-bye for me to Mark Lester," she said.

"I believe, dear, you are rich. Uncle Tony says not, but I fancy he must be mistaken. True, I know nothing of money matters. You are going amongst strangers. Dorothea, I fancy your father will want you to marry early. That was always a favourite idea of his. How shall I say it? Do not make an irretrievable mistake. We can make so few of those, and they last so long."

Dorothea lay back, wondering.

"You will laugh at me for speaking of marriage, but every woman's life has some sort of love-story in it. No greater misfortune can befall a woman than to marry a man who does not love her. For a woman's whole life is love"—aunt Mary's fingers trembled—"nothing else matters. You are rich, I believe; I know you look sweet. A woman can only marry once. Never forget that. She may have several husbands: she can only marry once."

"But, auntie——"

"Your father will want you to marry. Young girls say 'yes' so lightly. It is easy to say 'yes': it is easy to say 'no.' On those little words hangs a woman's whole life. And we have but one life, Dorothea!"

There was a note of anguish in aunt Mary's voice which Dorothea had never heard there before. The girl lay gazing at the darkness, and her mother's portrait seemed to take slow shape against the empty wall. "You mean," said Dorothea, "that mamma should have said 'no.'"

One fatal moment's hesitation answered her. Then she broke into passionate, tumultuous weeping, very unlike the tranquil tears of all that sorrowful day. "Oh, you are unkind!" she sobbed. "I love you! Oh, you are unkind!"

"Dearest and dearest," entreated aunt Mary, sick with desperation, "who knows what may happen before we can speak to each other again? All I would say is: Decide for yourself—not too hastily. Judge for yourself. Let no one deceive you. Ask God to help you. I know I am saying it wrong. But, oh, my dear love, your life's happiness——!"

She bent down, and speaking very swiftly and softly:

"Thirty years ago," she said, "Dominé Lester asked me to be his wife. Nobody, I don't mind telling you now, had ever asked me before: nobody has asked me since. The match

was disapproved of: I said no. His present wife is an excellent woman. Yes, after six years, he married his present wife."

Aunt Mary sat gazing at the gaunt trees outside; with one hand she stroked Dorothea's hair.

"I often wonder whether any one profited by my—decision. I hope so. Emma and I have been happy together."

"I have," said Dorothea: she raised herself slowly and kissed her aunt on the lips. "I understand," she continued. "My grandfather Brodryck, your stepfather, did this thing. He made my mother's marriage and prevented yours."

"Let the dead rest," said aunt Mary faintly.

"I have always known he was a wicked old man."

"Hush, dear, none of us has told you."

"Others have told me."

"Dorothea, love your father—you will find him very lovable—obey him, but, dear motherless one, promise me here, where we have so often talked over all our hearts' secrets together, that you will never marry because he bids you—never for that reason alone."

"I promise," replied Dorothea, with vague conceptions of possible meanings in the words. And then the two women kneeled down together, in the moonlight that streamed on the empty bed.

"Yes, Sandring has sent for her to get her married," said aunt Emma, tugging at her curls. "He told us as much when we last saw him. Marriage is his ideal for a woman. Faugh!"

"I tried to warn her. I did it all wrong. You would have done it better," said Mary.

"Possibly. But be sure you did it more nicely. A man's ideal! Pooh!"

"I—I suppose so," said Mary.

"And to think what sort of a creature will be Sandring's ideal of a son-in-law!"

"I sometimes fancy we wrong him."

"Yes, dear. You never saw evil in any one without fancying that."

"Oh, Emma—Emma! what will the house be without her? Her laugh in the garden! Her step on the stairs!" Emma suddenly abandoned her curls.

"God will bring her back to us," said Mary.

"Antony has promised to do it," said Emma.

CHAPTER III.

PARIS is surely, of all cities that have bared their fading splendours to the changeless sun, most sure of easy triumph o'er the commonplace mind of man. The barbaric extravagances of Babylon, the exquisite harmonies of Athens, the crimson pageant of Rome, these belong to various stages of mental development in races that loved beauty for its own sake. And the subtler delicacies of Eastern ingenuity even to this day, the lace-work of Delhi, the flower-work of Pekin, the bead-work of Granada, these appeal to souls that feel loveliness, when they see it, without knowing why. For few men can stop to study, in the toil and moil of their daily existence, the sensuous gratifications that unconsciously surround them; and the charm of a city, unlike a picture's or a statue's, is pre-eminently for the many, not for the few. In our days, then, when artistic sensation has broadened and grown shoddy, like the art it endeavours to feed on, when beautifulness has got to spread itself everywhere and sparkle cheaply, an imitation diamond—in these days artistic enjoyment must be very loud and plain. Things must be big and bright, and costly; they must clearly inform us that they are fine. Their price, above all, must be manifest: how else should we know they were admirable? The sum expended upon their construction should be carved on the front of our new public buildings. In the monotony of their ugliness there would then at least be something that a man of education could call great.

To Paris, however, as to no nineteenth century city—excepting, perhaps, Buda-Pesth—belongs the secret of spending immense amounts of money with fairly satisfactory results. Unnoticed glories are, of course, not for these days of ours. King Mob must have his money's worth—an idea, be it said in passing, that never yet entered the brain of a gentleman. But the gigantic things that Paris has to do, it can at least do decorously. More than

that, it can do them delicately, with gracious and graceful care. It can erect public buildings, that do not swell like warts and bunions on the fair face of the city: it can lay down railways that do not cut across it like the slashes of some hideous sore. And yet more, it can spread a smile, from out the inner gladness of its people, over all its wide circumference of streets. Sunshine lies upon the faces of the passers-by; sunshine ripples in the words they speak, the flowers and ribands that they wear; sunshine flashes even in their brightly-toned advertisements, their happy tricolor, their cheerful awnings and the tempered gilt of their façades. If the mission of our modern art be, as all say, to divert the multitude, surely it remains a cordial thing, that a means be found to gratify the vulgar, in which even the non-vulgar may be glad.

Dirt cannot lie on the countenance of Paris. Like the beautiful woman she is, she cares for her daily appearance with scrupulous vigilance; but, nothing can remedy an impure complexion, as beautiful women know well. The cure must come from the inside, from the blood. Smoke, steam, paraffin, smuts, all the vile smithy-curse of our civilisation, these blotches men tell us must fester—Paris puffs them away. The gaiety, the gracefulness, the charm of her inhabitants rise like a flood over all that is horrible; fall, with the sparkle of fountains, on dust. Vice may abound in the purlieu of the city. Where it shows itself it is neither outrageous nor grotesque. Shameless it may be; but at least it is not disgusting, and even when most aggressive, it has the decency not to flare. And if this be the new Babylon (as aunt Mary believes it is, when not mindful of the Papacy), then, at least, genius flings open the flower-filled temples of Ashtaroath, and that sight is surely more delectable than the gratings of the grimy sanctuary where Mammon sits enthroned on gold.

It may rain, but it is never dark in Paris. The city may be sad, it can never be dull. Misery smiles there, with tears in its eyes. Sickness jokes the physicians that are probing its wounds. And when the bright city goes mad with fierce dreams of its own proud divinity, and the blood of its children is poured in broad streams down its beautiful boulevards, then its pulses beat quicker, its shoutings rise higher, the red blood flows redder—than where helots still bow their drink-soddened brows 'neath the grinding boots of their "betters," and the music to which brave souls

die willingly is the sweetest illusion of the high glories of man!

Dorothea, as her glances leaped right and left through the windows of her railway omnibus, felt all the delight of one who, turning a long wall of granite, suddenly beholds an immense tract of landscape: valleys, lakes, cities, the sea. It is queer, in these travelled days, to realise that a normal trip to Paris can convey new impressions to any one: let us be grateful, you and I, that, however jaded we may be, the world is always fresh to somebody. Dorothea had not travelled, except along the Rhine: the aunts disapproved of France, which was atheistical and papistical, and had killed its king. She had been carefully brought up by a Swiss governess at home. "Her education," said uncle Tony, "has been admirably in accordance with all recognised requirements. She knows nothing that she ought to know, and nothing that she oughtn't."

Everything had charmed her on the journey, as soon as she cheered up. She had not disapproved vehemently, like Rebecca, of the coffee at Brussels.

"Freule," barked the disgusted waiting-woman, "remember we can still go back."

"Back?"

"Yes—back. The ladies would be very glad to see you."

"Why, I don't know *when* I shall go back?"

"I do," replied Rebecca.

But Dorothea had become interested in a very stout and shiny Frenchman who entered her compartment, struggling under an over-abundance of badly packed parcels, containing toys. "Containing" is, perhaps, hardly the word: Dorothea helped to pick up a good many odds and ends. She remained grave when he tried a tin trumpet, explaining that it was for Jean, "mon soldat," but she laughed with him when he pulled out a drawer from a grocer's shop and scattered a quantity of rice over them both. Rebecca sat, drawn up in a furthestmost corner, her fancy at work on impossible crimes. "Ah, mademoiselle," said the Frenchman, pausing in a long account of his grandchildren, "to be interested in playthings, one must be very young, as you are, or very old, as I." He saw the lights of the city before she did. "Accept," he said, "my felicitations! Nothing equals a first view of Paris, unless it be seeing it again."

Dorothea was reflecting, at that moment, that nothing

can equal the awkwardness of meeting a father you don't know. Colonel Sandring, however, fully shared this opinion, and as awkward situations were the one thing he most anxiously avoided, the aunts had sat helplessly staring since noon at a telegram requesting Dorothea to come on at once to the hotel. "Well, I'm glad," she said, as soon as the commissionaire had found her, "that I didn't address the wrong person as 'Papa.' You needn't look glum, Rebecca; you didn't expect a father."

"I expected yours," retorted Rebecca; "he'd have led us out of this Babylonian confusion. Jabbering worse than a mad-house. And all gibberish from first to last."

"Also, I warn you, I shall laugh whenever you say 'Babylonian.'"

"The wick—some people mock me without a cause," quoted the handmaid. "The ladies——"

"The ladies may use the word, for at least they know what it means. I don't believe there were railway stations in Babylonia. Now, please don't be cross. You'll enjoy your supper."

"Unless it's frogs," replied Rebecca.

To her mind the view from the omnibus windows presented no other impression than bewilderment. And yet there is surely no more healthfully intoxicating, no more pleasurable bracing spot upon the earth than a bit of Paris boulevard on a fine winter evening. The bright light, full, yet never flaring; the soft air, fresh, but never raw, the quick movements, never ungraceful, the vivacity that stops short of roughness, the alertness that avoids all unpleasantness everywhere, the simplicity that cannot look sordid, the luxury that cannot look vulgar, the rhythmical harmonies of motion and appearance and utterance in thousands of mortals who, whatever they may happen to be doing, are sure to be doing it pleasantly—all these combine to give the foreigner an impression of gladness unsurpassed by anything except the song of thrushes in a copse. And no wonder, for in the heart of every Frenchman a bird carols ceaselessly, often clamorous, sometimes gentle, never still.

The little hatless woman who tripped aside before their vehicle, holding up her tight-fitting black cloth skirt, had not perhaps our northern regularity of feature—though who could find time to observe this beside the brightness of her eyes?—but Dorothea noticed a dainty step that is shared by no other nymphs in Christendom, and a fit of gown and

boot such as gold cannot buy in Philistia. And the red-faced cabby, whose reckless driving had distracted her own (bad) coachman, might use reprehensible language, but never silk that in park or square was worn as that cabby wore his glazed one. Why, even the names on the shop-fronts had their own inherent grace of curve and accent! Look at "Saucisson," with the pretty half-moon in the middle. Put it beside "Sausage" or "Wurst"!

Even the long Rue La Fayette, so hideous on departure, seems happy and bright when you arrive: you can almost forgive it for proving interminable. But what when it comes to an end, as all things interminable do, and you suddenly glide, O Dorothea, into the musical maelstrom of the Opera?

The turmoil of the Grand Hotel courtyard brought with it that inevitable amount of ill-treatment which always befalls a shy person from hard-pressed officials: in immediate contrast to all this strange clatter and crush Dorothea found herself ushered into a silent and softly-lighted sitting-room, which a tall man of military appearance simultaneously entered from the farther end.

"My dear girl!" said Colonel Sandring, his whole face, form, and accent one eager advance. He stopped dead. "Is that—a—person your maid. Would you tell her to wait outside?" Dorothea found him just the handsome, sunburnt man she had expected. Only a good deal more wrinkled about the eyes.

He kissed her affectionately on both cheeks, led her forward, and took away her umbrella. "An absurd position, is it not?" he said. "Let us try to ignore it. You are handsomer, my dear, than your photos. I always imagined you were dark, like your mother. Well, many men prefer fair women. Of course I should have loved you"—he laughed—"even had you been positively plain. But, my dear, you are the very reverse—I assure you, the very reverse." He kissed her again and brought her a footstool and turned up the lamp-shade.

"Of course you got my telegram? For your sake I felt that a platform was not the place to——no, let us do the thing in private. It is absurd, I grant you, but also it is a little—touching. And your aunts never received my three-weeks-old letter till yesterday. Surely, forgive me, the postal arrangements of Holland are—are a little behind-hand?"

"I—I believe they are considered good," said Dorothea lamely. She always remembered afterwards that this stupid bit of information was the first thing she said to her father. "But your letter went to Utrecht in America."

"Ah?—that is the bigger city, of course: everything is bigger in America. Please, do not think I wished to disparage your native country. It is your native country, isn't it? That, too, seems funny! I like defective postal arrangements: they save one such a lot of unpleasant correspondence. Now, do you know, once in South Africa, the post kept back a lot of letters of mine because they thought they contained money, while, as a matter of fact, they had been sent me by my duns. You know what duns are?"

"Cows?" ventured Dorothea, with much hesitation.

"Well, no, not exactly, but your English is wonderful for a foreigner! Why, Dolly, I feel a rich man to-night. You won't mind my calling you 'Dolly'? The other seems rather a mouthful."

Before Dorothea's vision rose up wild scenes of tears and foot-stampings with the Lesters over that dollish nickname of "Dolly," but her eyes looked into her father's face with a question she could not induce her lips to frame.

"It was my pet name for your mother," he said softly. "My dear Dolly, I feel I am ridiculous: it cannot be helped. Women always behave so much better in matters of sentiment. Our costume hampers us. Now, in a toga, I should know exactly what to do, and look better doing it."

Dorothea tried to fancy her admirably-coated sire in a toga.

"Everything has turned out ridiculous: of course I expected we should have plenty of time to write and arrange things. I—I had always expected your aunts to broach the subject. I am sure you understand my feeling?" He bent forward a little anxiously.

"They would never have done that," answered Dorothea quickly.

"Pray do not think I intend to convey a suggestion of blame. On principle, I never blame any one, excepting servants and tradespeople. But really, I assure you, it has always been settled that you would return to me as soon as you came of age."

"I'm not of age!" exclaimed Dorothea.

"My dear, you surely were twenty-one yesterday? I

have always understood that things moved slowly in Holland, but surely a birthday doesn't take more than a year to come round?"

"No—but——"

"A good thing if it did!"

"In Holland, at any rate, father, people come of age at twenty-three."

There was a moment's embarrassed silence: then Colonel Sandring burst into peals of laughter. "I might have known! I might have known!" he cried. "Of course it'd take a Dutchman longer to come of age than any other man! What did your aunts think I wanted you all of a sudden for?"

Dorothea blushed, unable to give aunt Mary's explanation, even assuming it to be incontestably the correct one. "I suppose, because you—wanted me," she said.

She looked so charming over the shyly spoken words that Colonel Sandring exclaimed with fervour: "Well, I'm awfully glad you are come, my dear. What a mercy that no one had time to explain. I detest explanations. They always complicate matters so. Your mother, I remember, came of age through her marriage. People do, it appears, in your country. As if a man under age who goes and marries shouldn't rather have a second guardian given him, like an imbecile!"

"How young were you when you married?" cried Dorothea, catching her father's laugh.

"My dear, have I said I was not an imbecile? All the happiness of my life I have owed to my follies. We were fools in a fools' paradise, your mother and I. We were very happy, Dorothea." His voice sank: he sat resting his great moustache on his hand. Dorothea listened, uncertain, pleased.

A terrific bang at the door sent the Colonel flying from his chair. Dorothea stared, astonished, to see a brave man go so suddenly white! Who's that? Stop where you are! D—— it, didn't I tell you I couldn't receive you!" Sandring rushed hastily forward: his daughter listened, shocked beyond measure by the first oath she had ever heard uttered. "I fear it is my maid," she faltered. The door fell open wide: Rebecca filled the doorway.

"Sarah was right, though I wouldn't believe it," shouted Rebecca, "when she said, the waiters kissed you in the passage. I won't stay there another minute, not I!"

"She says the servants try to kiss her!" explained Dorothea in distress.

Colonel Sandring slowly studied the broad-beamed and hard-featured female. "Dear me!" he replied.

"I am sorry they insulted you," said Dorothea.

"Me? No, indeed. I should like to see them try to. It was another girl, white and pink, with ringlets. But I will not connive by my presence, at the doing of deadly sin!"

"Oh—she saw them try to kiss some one else," explained Dorothea, much relieved.

The Colonel turned on his heel. "Quite so," he said. "I can understand her finding *that* disagreeable. Dorothea, are you tired? I suppose you will dine in your room?"

"Have you had dinner?" asked Dorothea.

Now Colonel Sandring, though he could act the biggest prevarications, was incapable of telling the smallest lie. "Not yet," he said, a little ruefully. "I will order something nice for us both in the restaurant. Is there any wine you especially care for? Champagne, I suppose?"

"I am a total abstainer."

"Phew! My dear child, not—not, I hope, a Blue Ribbonite?"

"No, not a Blue Ribbonite."

"You relieve me. The shade they have selected is so unnecessarily hideous. How that blue blot on her bosom must limit a woman in the choice of her clothes!"

"Please, father, don't go thinking I'm a faddist. I hate faddists. But one of our gardeners that aunt Emma wanted to turn away promised me to stop drinking brandy if I took the pledge not to touch wine."

"The connection is evident," said the Colonel, smiling unsweetly.

"My wine to his brandy, you see."

"I see. I presume this toper derives satisfaction from the thought that he has at least made one person teetotal."

"Oh, father, I'm sure he keeps his word."

"Naturally you are. I shall telegraph to this fellow to get publicly drunk at my expense." Then he came back to her. "I'm so glad," he said, "you have generous impulses. I believe I had generous impulses at twenty-one. I know your mother had. You are very like your mother. Even more than I thought at first. You have that same

lofty look about the eyebrows. I am sure you are very good." And he took her hand, and touched it with his lips. "That is right. One likes a young girl to be good."

"And an old woman?" queried Dorothea, feeling suddenly brighter.

"An old woman undoubtedly." Colonel Sandring walked thoughtfully downstairs.

In the brilliant vestibule, all glitter and mirrors, full of the odours and sounds of the huge *table d'hôte* close at hand, a woman, gorgeously clothed in a long evening cloak of gold brocade, lounged on a crimson settee, watching the people who passed her.

"Ah!" she said. "Enfin! Have you quarrelled already, that the first encounter should have lasted so long?"

"She is exquisite," replied the Colonel, reddening. "Simple, and sensible, and sweet. And forgive me, dear Blanche, if I say, she is not of the women who quarrel!"

"Well, am I to wait here much longer? What is the decision?"

"The decision is that she dines with me downstairs. I will tell, therefore, this boy to call a cab. You will drive to—let me see—Véfour will be handiest—you will have a quiet little repast there, with a glass of your favourite Sauterne, and then you will just step across to the Palais Royal—see, here are the two tickets—where, in any case, I shall fetch you for supper."

The woman frowned. "Our last night in Paris!" she exclaimed. "And I hate seeing farces alone. Nor shall I dine by myself in this costume at a café, as if I were a— No, keep your tickets. Take your daughter to see 'Les trois femmes à Papa'! I shall have a snack of something here in the restaurant, and then I shall go off to bed."

"Here in the restaurant? Are you mad?"

"By no means. That sort of thing will be constantly occurring. Better get it over at once."

"It will not occur to-night," said the Colonel. "I intend to enjoy my daughter tranquilly to-night. You will oblige me by dropping the subject. You know how I abhor any sort of altercation."

She gazed into his eyes. "Very well," she said. "Mind you come for me at the Palais Royal."

The Colonel, slightly shrugging his shoulders, went up to fetch his daughter, whom he found waiting in her grey travelling dress with a big hat and boa.

"You are very tall," said the Colonel, satisfied, "and you walk well. I like your walk." He followed her, watching every movement. At the bottom of the stairs she stopped. "Oh, what a beautiful cloak!" she said.

She walked slowly across the hall, her eyes immovably fixed on the garment and its wearer. The lady of the cloak, but slightly modifying her recumbent attitude, bent forward, a loose fan between her careless fingers, staring back.

"My *dear* child, this way——" said the Colonel.

Dorothea moved slowly to the left, as he directed her. "Do you know," she began, whilst they took their places at a little table, "I never saw so splendid a garment before! That comes of being in Paris. I fear you will find me very uncivilised, father!"

"Women of your class, Dolly, don't, as a rule, notice women of *that*."

She glanced across at him; he had turned to a waiter. The next moment she had understood, and she flushed to the roots of her hair. Of course she *knew*, yet never had she come in contact with any form of the reality; nay, nor with any presentation of the subject, outside the hallowed pages of the Bible, in which all things look pure beneath the pure light from on high. She trusted that her father would not understand her blushes, and the thought made her blush all the deeper, in ripples of carmine that spread down her neck.

Her father sat watching her. . . .

CHAPTER IV.

COLONEL SANDRING's character must speak for itself in the course of this veracious narrative. Not that it needs vindication, for the Colonel was one of those fortunate good fellows who have hundreds of pleasant acquaintances all over the world. These united in praising his courage and generosity and good-nature. True, the people who disliked him, disliked him thoroughly, but these were men and women, chiefly women, whom he hardly knew. Other women loved him: he had always been an easy favourite where he sought for favours, and what does a wise man care for the scorn he passes by? In one of his Mexican campaigns a young half-caste had killed herself for him, purposely getting shot by a rival in his stead. No blame attached to him—at least, as regards the shooting; next morning he had enriched the mother with all the spoils of his year's hard work.

Of the bravery which had gained him so many medals he was hardly conscious, but he painfully realised the good-nature which had lost him so many gold pieces. "I can't say No!" was his frequent lamentation. Had you woke him in the middle of the night to inquire for the name of his worst enemy, he would probably first have told you to go to — (that enemy), but afterwards he would certainly have informed you that the enemy's name was "I can't say No." For, on his side, he had no strong passions of antipathy. He disliked ugly women, very good women, and cowardly men.

He rose at about noon on the day after Dorothea's arrival—"Mid-day to three in the morning is long enough for me," says the Colonel—and dressed with his usual consideration of detail. He felt pleasantly tickled in his very soft heart, and slightly oppressed in his rather light conscience, by the thought of possessing a daughter. A charming possession, clear, beautiful, transparent, but 'as difficult to carry about the world as a jelly. He must walk circum-

spectly. "I shall show her a bit of Paris," he said to himself, as he leisurely descended the staircase. "I must be careful to let her see the world generally right side up." He found Dorothea eagerly waiting for him (since nine o'clock). "We will lunch at Ledoyen's," he said, "and go for a drive. The day is fine, but I hope you don't mind about weather. Your health is all right?"

"I never was ill in my life."

"That is right. Little ailments are a daily nuisance. One hates a woman with megrims."

Much as she inevitably enjoyed the sight-seeing, that day does not survive in Dorothea's memory as a vision of un-mixed delights. Her father drove her at a slashing pace, in a victoria, along the boulevards and up into the Bois de Boulogne. In her ignorance her desire to "visit the curiosities" would have taken a more antiquarian turn, but her father was too experienced a traveller not to know what could be done in half a day, and knowingly do less. Besides, the Colonel had a healthy dread of churches and museums. Classic art was a closed book to him, and, unlike nine educated people out of ten, he did not make grotesque attempts to turn the pages of a volume he was holding upside down. The patter of the boulevards he had at his fingers' ends: he knew about the people of the moment, the people who are making money or a noise. He recognised the prints of popular pictures, had an opinion on the successful novels of the last two years (earlier ones he had forgotten), and could hum snatches from dozens of operas, or, still more generally, operettas. His talk to his daughter, as they drove through the bewildering city, eddied like a whirlpool, in which she sank, hopelessly a fool. Had they betaken themselves to the Louvre, she would have recognised the names, at least, of Rembrandt or Rubens, or even Jean Goujon, but the Colonel rattled of Forain, of Cheret, of Péladan and Caran d'Ache. Never consciously unreasonable, he would lightly have accepted her ignorance of many subjects, but he thought she might have heard of Baron Haussmann or of M. Charles Garnier. She need not have been aware, perhaps, that the Jockey Club is hardly an institution for the moral benefit (undoubtedly desirable) of horse-jockeys, but she might have heard somewhere, the Colonel thought, that the Bois de Boulogne does not run along the Channel coast!

"Jean de Reszké is a famous opera singer," said the

Colonel mildly. "My dear—after all—you are twenty-one—have you never been to an opera?"

"Aunt Mary thought operas wicked," replied Dorothea.

"Operas? Music? The gift of God? Why, look at the birds, child! God has an opera performance at sunrise every day!"

"Don't you think that's an oratorio?" replied Dorothea quietly.

Her father glanced at her tranquil face, delighted to get so good a reply. "Of course I knew there *were* such people," he said presently. "'Exeter Hall' we call them, 'Little Bethel.' It's my fault, though I don't see how I could have helped it. Never mind, Dolly; but had it been the theatre, I think I might at least have attempted to understand."

"Aunt Emma disapproved of the theatre," replied Dorothea. "She thought an opera performance might elevate the soul."

"Ah! Now, I dare say your aunt Emma and I would have understood each other!"

"Ye—es," answered Dorothea doubtfully. "Aunt Mary is a sweet creature, father, please. I love her dearly."

"Quite right, Dolly. I also am deeply grateful to her. Your aunts are most estimable. Look at that woman yonder, driving those showy bays! That is the *Princesse de Gardagne*, who has just succeeded in getting her husband locked up in a private asylum, though he's no more insane than I."

"Why?"

"My dear, I cannot tell you," was the Colonel's diplomatically truthful reply.

"But how?" gasped the girl.

"Oh, of course it cost her a lot. But she was a wise woman, and had her money tied up for herself when she married. We shall do the same thing some day for you."

"Is such wickedness possible?" stammered Dorothea, suddenly trembling from head to foot.

The Colonel could not forbear smiling. "My dear, you have read of worse, I presume, in history," he answered. "There was *Messalina* and *Lucretia Borgia*, and—I don't think I can remember any other very bad women out of history—out of other people's histories. You will have to look out for bad people, child—bad men especially. However, you women have your instincts, thank God. Men are as naturally attracted by wickedness as women are repelled by it."

"But, father, that's an easy apology for men!"

"Is it? Most men, I fancy, do not ask for an apology. For heaven's sake, don't let us get lugubrious. Isn't that exquisite, the long lines of carriages right up to the Étoile?"

"Exquisite," responded Dorothea, who was gazing at the primrose sunset beyond the majestic arch. A long silence would have settled between them but that the Colonel detested silences even more than unsympathetic discourse.

"Redfern," he read aloud in the Rue de Rivoli. And behold, there was no response! Now, a girl need know little of the many things that occupy her father, but surely she should seek to share, even from a distance, the few paltry interests of her sex! "Of course you weren't able to get things before leaving," he said. "These people have a place at Nice. 'In season and out of season' they'll be able to provide you with everything you want." The quotation struck him as particularly neat. "Like a gown from Redfern's," he thought, "it fits."

"And Dorothea's does not." Then, suddenly a fresh fancy seemed to fill him with pleasure. He told the coachman to drive to the Rue de la Paix, and entered a jeweller's shop.

"Choose something!" he said, as Dorothea stood, amazed, amid the scintillating treasures. "I am disgusted at having to add, 'Not too magnificent, please.' Forgive me. Still we can get some trifling memento of this wonderful first day together." He picked up a diamond star. "Now, this is pretty, and probably not too expensive. I am disgusted: I should have liked to have given you the finest necklace in the shop."

"I never had anything half so splendid in my life," cried Dorothea.

"Then, it's high time you began. But your aunts are quite right; young girls shouldn't wear jewels. This little trifle'll just do. It's your birthday present. My dear child, don't look so frightened, or you'll drive me to tell you the pitiful price. Hurry up." He held open the shop door. "We shall just be in time to get some dinner before the train starts."

The train started at about eight that evening, a Riviera train de luxé. Sleeping-cars and restaurant-cars were newer in those days than now; Dorothea had never

seen them, nor had she come in contact with the class of people who patronised that superlatively expensive and uncomfortable modern mode of travelling. A babel of nationalities filled the wide platform, yet none of these presented any pleasing originality; rather they all appeared parodies of one another. All of them were self-conscious, and scornful (with reason) of their neighbours; all of them gave themselves airs, probably because they had lost the air of their ancestors; many were titled (with coronets on their boxes) and most were too rich. Loud men and louder women, carefully, and manifestly, made up to look younger than they were, clothed in the eccentricities of checks, capes, caps, covert-coats, etc., the whole extravaganza of horsiness dear to the sporting taste of the day, which revels in a general aspect and odour of leather and stable-cloths. Pyramids of trunks were being carted right and left round Dorothea, but what astonished her most were the torrents of superfine hand-baggage, dressing bags, despatch-boxes, bouquets, lap-dogs, canaries, rugs, overalls, furs, air-cushions, tennis-rackets, hot-water bottles, pouring down on all available spaces in what seemed a hopeless pell-mell. Without these things you and I know our daughters cannot travel; let us be thankful that there still exist backwoods even in Europe, where a girl may grow up quite simple, yet refined.

"Now, here's your sleeper," said Colonel Sandring, turning up, perfectly cool, in the hubbub, his interminable cigarette between his lips. "There's an awful crush, at this season. I was very lucky in being able to effect an exchange."

"And yourself?" asked Dorothea.

"Oh, I'm an old stager. I shall go on, by another train, with your maid. There's no danger, Dolly." He laughed to her, but she hadn't understood.

"Here's a couple of napoleons for the journey. Don't speak to any one, especially not your companion in this hole for the night. Drive straight to the Grand Hotel at Nice on arriving. My train comes in an hour or two later. It couldn't be helped. I tried hard enough to get a third—a second berth yesterday."

"It's your discomfort I was thinking of," replied Dorothea. "Please father, I must just speak to my maid."

"I don't mind," replied Rebecca tartly. "It's *you*, Freule,

that's going to be killed in that little box. Good-night." She went and established herself on a truckful of luggage, from which she had first carefully removed a black poodle, right under the gold glasses and Wellington nose of its painted and powdered proprietress.

"Marquise, it is a peasant!" explained a sickly little male creature in a pink and white collar. "I can see that, mon cher," retorted the harridan, "but my father would have shot the impudent dead!" The unconscious Rebecca sat grimly confronting the poodle, which was a marvellous "First Prize," curled, tasselled and trimmed.

"Satan!" she exploded, like a thunderbolt. The poodle showed his teeth, not because she likened him to an angel, but because she had thrust him from his high estate. Rebecca smiled fearlessly back, and, as she gazed across her surroundings, the rugged smile broadened. She approved of the Devil, and his doings. He fitted into her system. A sort of moral shower-bath to the righteous. Bracing.

In front of Dorothea's cabin a female voice, that was authoritatively summoning the conductor, stopped, in a loud rustle of silk underskirts. A strong smell of violets filled the little chamber. A big, florid lady, in black feathers and the fashionable hair-dye, obstructed the door.

"Ah, c'est ici," she said. "Bien! Bonjour, madame."

Dorothea started to her feet, her heart full of a nameless terror which she was doing her best to keep back from her eyes. Stammering some incoherent apology, she pushed past the newcomer, who was leisurely examining her quarters, and, breathless, caught the Colonel by the arm, where he calmly stood buying a *Figaro*.

"Father!" she stuttered, "I can't travel in that compartment. There's a person come in that—the woman with the cloak!"

"Calm yourself, for goodness sake—people are looking," said the Colonel angrily. "Good gracious, how pale you are!"—all the anger had died out of his voice. "Don't be a fool, Dolly. Of course there's another passenger. She won't speak to you. And if she does, just reply, yes or no." Thus far the Colonel, who considered he had admirably solved a rather awkward dilemma at no slight inconvenience to himself. He had been very anxious that Dorothea should come away to him at once, for fear of never getting her at all.

"But you don't understand," she cried in anguish. "It's

the woman we saw at the hotel. I can't spend a night with that woman!"

"Well, she was at the hotel last night, and she's going on, probably, to Nice. What more natural? Are you afraid?"

Dorothea drew back a step. "Afraid?" she said. "Of her hitting me? No."

"Of her hurting you?" He smiled.

"Yes."

"En voiture, s'il vous plait!" said a passing conductor.

"Come, Dorothy, you're behaving like a baby. Look here, I got this for you!" He ran after her, as she turned feeling the hopelessness of all argument, and pushed into her hand a dainty parcel of chocolates. "Sleep well! Bon voyage! Meet me at Nice with a smile!"

Long after the train had started, Dorothea sat, squeezed as tight as she could squeeze into the far corner by the window, quite still, shrinking away. She looked out a good deal into the night, but you soon get tired of that. The cabin was full of the heavy odour of violets; the neighbour, less immovable, rustled all the time. Once, in turning to get something out of her bag, which she was constantly opening and shutting, she put down her white-gloved hand on a fold of Dorothy's skirt. The girl's heart gave a horrible leap, and went on bumping. As her thoughts grew a little calmer, she felt ashamed of herself, yet she knew there was no other impulse at work in her bosom than grief and compassion, grief above all. Through the long, long hours, when the light had been veiled and the train went crashing through the darkness, Dorothea lay on her narrow top-shelf, not undressed—she *could not* have undressed—lay with troubled eyes she hardly dared to close. Yet, from time to time she closed them, for long periods, praying with all her innocent heart and soul, in passionate strainings of the lips, for the woman tranquilly snoring beneath her.

And for herself she prayed, in deep humility, with tender liftings of the heart to God, who had kept her from great temptation. She hid away her watch under her pillow, and also the diamond star. Not that she distinctly doubted the person's honesty, but she vaguely knew, from the Book of Proverbs, that such women lived by plunder. She knew nothing, except that all we, like sheep have gone astray, yet that between this sort of sinners and all others a great

gulf lay fixed, into which her flock could never wander, but from which, in all their strayings, they shudderingly turned away. Sleep would have been impossible in any case. The train banged and rattled on with frequent stops, loud bumpings, a blowing of horns that might wake the dead: the air in the tiny compartment was stifling, the cramping boards caused every limb to ache. And she lay, through the lengthening hours of persistent creaking and heaving, lay praying, praying, praying for the woman who snored below.

She climbed down from her perch in the morning, stiff and soiled, feeling as if she would never be clean again. Early light did not suit the French lady's complexion, but, being an experienced traveller, she got herself far more easily into some sort of trim. She seemed to ignore the presence of anyone else in the crowded car: she said "Pardon, madame," a good many times, but otherwise acted exactly as she liked.

She rushed away for lengthy meals, and ate fruit and sweetmeats and other things promiscuously in between. She also drank something out of a bottle. In the early morning Dorothea profited by a moment of solitude to read her usual chapter in the Bible, and, having finished it, turned with pardonable curiosity to that same Book of Proverbs, which gives so graphic a description both of the wisest woman and also of the wickedest that philosopher can realise, experience, or invent. She looked up presently from the volume on her knees, to meet the Frenchwoman's gaze fixed coolly upon her, and she gave a sharp start of surprise, for it seemed to her, in her first alarm and embarrassment, as if her companion must have been perusing the sacred passage upside down, or even now could read its meaning in her face. As if Madame Blanche would have understood a single word of it, even had it not been in Dutch!

"Pardon, madame," said the Frenchwoman. Dorothea's tell-tale eyes glanced hastily away to the strange clear southern landscape that had gradually revealed itself in the growing morning light, the landscape of silver-grey olives and aloes, the long grey stretches of rock and of clouded Mediterranean, the whiteness and brightness of the houses under the strong grey sky. She hid away her shabby little book and took out a Tauchnitz volume. In those days the train de luxe—was there ever name invented more

appropriately vulgar?—did not reach Nice till after noon; Dorothea, going to lunch, found herself seated opposite a table at which two men were laughing loudly. Near her sat Madame, serenely pensive, behind a cup of coffee and a glass of Chartreuse. Dorothea ate hastily off the dim-blue plates: it was not till she rose to attract the waiter's attention that she found her purse was gone!

"Oui, madame," said the waiter, standing expectant. "Trois francs cinquante et un seltz, ça fait quatre francs vingt-cinq."

"I have lost my purse!" gasped Dorothea. She remembered having put it in her pocket as she passed up the corridor. The men stopped talking. Madame did not turn her head.

The waiter looked intelligent interest, without any personal bias. "Perhaps Madame had dropped it?" he pretended to look under the table. "Perhaps she was sitting on it? No?"

"Well, there were always pickpockets at Marseilles. It was written up everywhere. 'Beware——'"

"I haven't left the train since Paris!" exclaimed Dorothea. And then, to her amazement, the man turned nasty, with the swift insolence of all these employés when once they see their chance. "Do you think that the company's servants have taken it? Or one of the passengers, the aristocracy of Europe? If you haven't the money to pay——"

"Can I be of service?" asked one of the men from the side-table, bending forward—oh, he was manifestly a gentleman, and plainly "no better than he should be"—a curious phrase, by the bye, which shows with how exceedingly little the world is agreed to be content. "Don't, pray, look so distressed, although it suits you admirably. Pray let me pay this man: it will be too cheap a pleasure——"

"Take your money and be gone," said the Frenchwoman, turning suddenly with a five-franc piece to the waiter. "This young lady travels in my compartment: we shall doubtless find the purse there. Shall we go and look for it?" And she led the way. Dorothea followed dumbly. Terrible visions had risen up before her of magistrates and policemen. What fearful fate was reserved for strangers who made debts of four francs twenty-five and had no money to pay?

"It is no use looking: it is stolen," she cried as she sank back on the seat, her hands before her eyes. "Oh, how shall I ever thank you for your kindness, your very great kindness?" She was humbled to the dust.

"Pooh, it is nothing! You will want a few francs on arriving: shall I put them down here, in your lap. Will you smell these salts? I am going on to Monte Carlo. No doubt your pocket was picked by one of these fine gentlemen in the corridor. You must realise, mademoiselle, that you are now on the coast where the cream and the scum of the world float uppermost. You will find the worst editions of humanity here—hi! hi!—black letter inside, bound in gold."

"I can never repay you," said Dorothea, struggling with her repugnance, "but still, you must give me an address to which I can send these few francs."

And now it was the other lady's turn to look embarrassed, under her powder. "For ten francs!" she said. "Pooh; it is not worth while. You will give them to the poor!"

Dorothea drew herself up. "I cannot remain indebted to you for more than your kindness," she said.

The Frenchwoman paused, then, with an extra rustle, she wrote down a few words on a scrap of her "Gil Blas" and handed them to Dorothea, who read:

"MADAME DE BARVIELLE,

"Poste Restante,

"Monâco."

"I have not yet decided on my hotel," said Madame de Barvielle. "This is Cannes. I will say goodbye. I am terribly thirsty, and am going to the restaurant to get something to drink."

Dorothea bowed, and they parted. The villas and hotels of Cannes crept nearer by on every side: the train stopped in an atmosphere of warmth and sunlight, an odour of eucalyptus and mimosa: the air was filled with English voices and clouds of dust. Dorothea sat through the endless waits and shuntings and final start, with troubled eyes that saw but little: she had no more thoughts for the wide display of nature's wealth, or of man's. The train stole softly along the shore towards Nice. The girl's breath came fast with nervousness. Presently she drew from her pocket a little book of devotional thoughts that aunt Mary

had given her on parting, and pushed it, trembling, into the side-pocket of the Frenchwoman's bag. Then, a moment later, she pulled it out again, and went in search of Madame de Barvielle, who sat in the restaurant-car behind a soda and something.

"Madame," said Dorothea unhesitatingly, "will you accept this trifle from me in memory of your kindness?"

The Frenchwoman smiled sweetly, took the book, and frowned. Then she looked up into the girl's simple face, and the scornful thanks died away from her lips.

"Gladly," she said: that was all, and Dorothea hastily climbed down to the platform.

A couple of hours later she was telling her father the whole of her adventures, all but the last little bit about the book. The Colonel, as we know, was a brave man. He bore the story well.

"Perhaps that will teach you to be less censorious," he said. "It's all right, of course, but you good women can be so devilish hard."

"I have no desire to be hard," replied Dorothea.

"You will have to be careful here. You see, you are now on the coast where the cream and the scum of the world float uppermost. You will find the worst editions of humanity here, black letter inside, bound in gold."

Dorothea stared at her father in blank amazement.

"You needn't stare so; it's true," he laughed.

But she stared all the harder.

CHAPTER V.

"Tour est pour le mieux dans le meilleur des mondes," said the Baroness, gazing down upon her shapely feet. These were cased in new-fashioned, ridiculous grass-green leather.

"The whole business has been d——d unlucky," replied the Colonel. The pair were sitting side by side on a bench of the terrace at Monte Carlo, watching the pigeon-shooting, he with appreciation, and she with relish. About them was all the enchantment of a perfect Riviera day.

"No harm has been done," said the Frenchwoman. "She knows me only as Madame de Barvielle."

"Which is not your name," said the Colonel, lighting a cigarette.

"And society knows me as the Baroness Blanche de Fleuryse."

"Which is," said the Colonel, blowing out the match. She looked at him askance, and tambourined her cream-gloved fingers against her crimson fan.

"The whole business has been d——d unlucky," repeated the Colonel.

"I cannot see it in that light. No correspondence! No recriminations! No objections! And just when you have made up your mind to abandon the idea, the young lady jumps into your arms."

The Colonel rose, flicked the ashes from his coat and leant with his back against the parapet.

"The young lady is here, and the money is in Holland," he said.

She turned suddenly from her abstracted watching of the wounded pigeons. "What do you mean?" she asked.

He answered her with a yawn. "I don't want to talk about money," he objected. "You know I hate talking about money."

"I like it," she answered. "What I detest talking about is bills. Lewis, I wish you would tell me exactly how matters stand."

"Exactly?—dear soul, what an awful word! This bright sunshine and cold wind are treacherous. There isn't really anything worth telling. Come, let us go into the Rooms."

She caught hold of him, unceremoniously, by the coat-tail. "Do not be disagreeable," she said. "Sit down and explain."

The Colonel sank back obediently. "Once—it was twenty years ago," he remarked, "I remember a woman said to me that I could not be disagreeable—to her."

"What sort of a woman? Was she fair or dark? Was she like me?" questioned Blanche with much interest.

"My dear, I—forget."

"Ah, how like a man!" She struck her fan across her fingers.

"No, I will be frank with you; I remember—too well. Let me see: what can you possibly want explained? When my poor wife died—dear me, that is even more than twenty years ago!—she left property worth five thousand a year to our daughter, of which one-fifth was settled in lifelong usufruct on myself. Have you any idea what is meant by usufruct?"

"Of course: you've got no capital, but a thousand a year till you die."

The Colonel sighed. "I suppose that is legally correct," he said, "yet I think you might have put it more prettily." His eyes wandered up to the cloudless heavens. "And there are people who say that women have no aptitude for affairs! Well, according to Dutch law, I enjoyed my daughter's whole income until she was twenty."

"Why twenty?" asked Madame.

"Do not ask me. The absurdest things always happen to you as soon as you come into contact with legislation. There is no giddier distraction than the chase after sense in the head of a lawyer. But it is exhausting. I have never seriously tried it. A person at Brodryck whom Dolly calls 'uncle Tony,' sends me occasional parcels of lawyers' stuff."

"Which you read?" cried the Baroness.

"How should I? They're all in Double Dutch." He yawned. "But of course, as soon as Dolly comes of age, her fortune is entirely her own. Do you happen to have some cigarettes about you?"

She gave him her little gold case.

"What did you do with all that money all those years?" she asked suddenly.

He stopped, in the very act of extracting a cigarette. "My dear Blanche," he said, "surely you realise that the whole of this absurd conversation is in the worst possible taste?"

"Well, you spent it! It is gone. For one year you have had to do without it. Never mind. She has now come of age; she has come to you, and you have got it all back again."

"How clearly you put things!" said the Colonel, gazing away at azure immensities of sea.

"Mind you keep it. She'll marry, and you'll lose it again."

"Even unpleasant things," added the Colonel sweetly.

"Any man less a sloven than you," continued Madame with swift vehemence, "would have claimed from the first the care of his own daughter's fortune!"

"And of his daughter?" inquired the Colonel, turning curiously, "or of the fortune only? Dear me, it hardly matters. These things, you see, are done with."

"But you preferred to rove about savage continents, getting yourself wounded in search of stupid medals——"

"Do not trouble to allude to my medals," interrupted Sandring, with a marked change of tone.

"Wasting diamond bangles on nigger——"

"What a bad shot!" cried Sandring, as a pigeon flew away. "Some people are so clumsy about bringing down their birds!"

He sat gazing mildly in front of him, then, all of a sudden, he looked round at her, with laughter that rippled and rang.

"Sold!" he cried.

"What on earth do you mean?" demanded the Baroness, bridling.

"Dolly isn't of age. They take two years more to arrive at maturity in Holland."

"Diable!" said the Baroness, and added, after some seconds: "There is use, then, nevertheless, in looking at lawyers' papers."

"On the contrary, I am glad of my ignorance. Had I known, I should have hesitated about asking my charming daughter to share my poverty, and should have missed the most delightful acquaintance I ever made in my life."

"At least, you will now look at the man's accounts? Perhaps he is robbing you!"

"Nonsense. People don't steal money. They cheat and they pilfer, but nobody hardly takes cash. Did you ever meet with any one who had taken cash?"

"I don't remember," said the Baroness uncomfortably.

"I never did; but then, I have no friends on the Stock Exchange. Burglary and picking pockets are just various forms of sport."

"Well, but what do you intend to live on?" she demanded.

"More debts. There is nothing easier, once you get started. Seriously, however, I dare say we shall rub on all right."

Madame looked at him for a moment with very kindly scorn.

"They can't let her starve, you know," continued the Colonel. "Uncle Tony must send me at least a thousand for her keep. That's what I let them have, all the years she was at Brodryck. Why, she'll want that in dresses! You'd say so, if you saw what she's got on. But, I beg of you, do not let us make my daughter a subject for any more financial—conversations. Her money is her own. I refuse to bother about it in any way. I sha'n't even ask for an allowance. I detest asking." He pushed his cane into the gravel, and dug it to and fro.

"You can't manage," said Madame.

"Pooh, an old soldier!"

"Who has always lived on his pay!" she cried, laughing.

"Besides, I need less money nowadays, I am growing old."

"You are five and forty."

"Do you speak in cruelty or in kindness?"

"I speak in resignation and in hope. But there is one thing you forget. Ready money is required at the tables. And what is a thousand pounds to a man so unlucky as you?"

"Just now you were calling me lucky," protested the Colonel.

"It was when I believed you the fortunate possessor of five thousand a year."

"And a daughter."

"True, I had forgotten the daughter."

Colonel Sandring smiled. The lady began to pace to

and fro along the balustrade. Then, stopping in front of him—

"It is the psychological moment," she said, "for the apparition of Pini."

The Colonel waited, disliking riddles. Besides, he says, if a woman is fond of asking them, she never can keep back the answer.

"You remember Pini, my Italian, who runs all my errands? I have had him for twenty years—ahem, ten. The brave Garibaldian—you remember him now? He adores me!"

"You have many adorers," replied the Colonel. "Still, I think I can recall a rather deprecatory gentleman of shabby-distinguished appearance—at Spa. Had he waxed moustaches?"

"He had."

"Then I remember him," said the Colonel decidedly, "for they were the waxedest I ever saw. What of him?"

"He is here, giving lessons which nobody takes. He has a system."

"For teaching Italian?"

"For winning at the tables."

"Poor fellow!" said the Colonel.

"No, it appears that it succeeds."

"Did he tell *you* that? Oh, fie, for shame!" said the Colonel.

"It is based on a sort of inverted martingale." She spoke with much conviction, and the smiling Colonel listened, as any gambler would. "Never double your losses: always double your gains. He must explain it to you himself. All he wants is capital."

"Ah, yes," said the Colonel gently. Both of them allowed their eyes to wander away to the incessantly falling pigeons, the monotonously monstrous Bang! But neither noticed the shots and the flutterings: you do not at Monte Carlo, unless you wish to: besides, these were thinking of yet larger slaughterings, more shameless and silly destruction still.

"A system," said the Colonel, "is a mathematical impossibility. Yet, whenever one is invented, you are asked to believe—in proof of its efficacy—that its possessor needs capital."

She flung open her fan. "Do not speak to me of mathematical impossibilities," she cried. "You have often told

me you were never able to do a sum in your life. Besides, it is always the impossible that happens. You must see Pini. We cannot be paupers, you and I."

The Colonel's big yawn had a touch of affectation in it. "We cannot be thirsty, you and I: let us go and have some tea. Signor Pini's system will wait. I promised my daughter to be back to dinner at Nice."

"Does she never want to come here?"

"Never. She believes the place is some unmentionable palace of wickedness, a gambling hell, or worse. Somebody has told her: not I. She thinks I go to Monaco, for sport."

Madame de Fleuryse laughed shrilly, looking still towards the smiling seascape. Then she said, in low, ringing accents: "She is right. This girl of yours is a good girl, do you know? She is better than you or I. As for us, nous nous valons."

"You flatter me," replied the Colonel, a little uneasily.

"And therefore the sooner she gets rid of us the better. For her sake and our own. Lewis, as for once in your life you have consented to talk business, how about your promise to me?"

"My dear Blanche, I never make promises. One sometimes has to keep them."

"Promise or not, you know very well what I mean."

"Wait till your Italian has brought you a fortune—you will not remind a poor beggar like me of any promises then."

He had risen: she would not look at his face, playing quickly with her fan.

"Above all, I beseech of you, do not let us worry each other. As long as my daughter remains unmarried, there can be no question of such a step on my part."

"Ah!" she said.

"Surely you would not expect me to do the child such wrong?"

"It is unnecessary to—emphasise." She turned to look at him then. "You mean this—positively?"

"It is difficult to know if one ever 'means' anything, but, yes, certainly, I think I may say I mean this."

"I thank you for telling me plainly. Your daughter, then, henceforth, becomes a charming—bore!" The Baroness de Fleuryse sailed up the great, wide esplanade, in all the brightness of sunshine, and flowers and brilliant

dresses : she held her head high : determination sat on her bold, false front and ruffled brow.

She had not gone many steps before she met someone she recognised. It would be difficult to do otherwise on the terrace at Monte Carlo.

"Lord Archibald Foye !" she exclaimed, and held out her hand.

The young man thus addressed, who was dawdling by the newspaper kiosk, unwillingly removed his eyes from a flaring drawing (and joke) in *Le Rire*. He was small, fair and freckled, smart-looking, one of those modern young men that are made by the dozen, well-born, well-dressed, well—nothing else.

"So I have always been told," he answered demurely. He put on a comic little quiver of his sandy eyelashes which made him look funny, even when saying the stupidest things. "I am awfully glad to see you," he added as an afterthought.

"You have not the faintest conception who I am."

"Well, when I know, I shall be all the gladder."

She laughed. "The Baroness Blanche de Fleuryse. I met you, a couple of years ago, in Paris with Colonel Sandring."

"Ah yes, just so—Sandring. How is Sandring? I haven't heard of him for years. Not dead, I hope?"

"No, indeed," replied the Baroness shuddering. "Why, pray, should he be dead?"

"Oh, I don't know. But I like to think people aren't dead. I remember now perfectly meeting you—Baroness."

She noticed his slight stumble over the title and rapidly answered : "It was at the house of my cousin, the Count di Casa Profonda."

"Exactly," said Archibald, repressing a grin. "Sandring hasn't shown in England for years. He's been all sorts of queer things in all sorts of places. I believe he is some kind of connection of ours."

"Colonel Sandring never speaks of his relations," replied the lady, "which is unusual, considering he is English, and they are—noble."

The young man flushed. At his birth the benevolent fairy had conferred on him an ample supply of good nature, but the wicked fairy, by her bestowal of tactlessness, had almost annulled the value of the gift. "That's a nasty one," he said, "but I forgive you. Look at this," he con-

tinued, pointing to the caricature, "isn't it good?" He shouted with fresh laughter over the customary husband and ballet-girl, then he went round to the pigeon-hole and put down a penny before the astonished old woman inside. "It's mean, I think, laughing at her papers and not paying her," he said. "And it's no use my buying their old *Punches*: I get a headache trying to worry out the jokes."

"If you like, I will translate them to you," suggested the kind-hearted Baroness.

"Now, that's awfully good of you," replied the young man warmly. "Do you know, I think—by Jove, that's an idea! I shall be grateful to you all my life for having suggested it. It's the egg of Columbus, by Jove!" He sat down on the nearest seat under pressure of his emotions. "You know the egg of Columbus?" he said.

"I do," replied the Baroness. "It is stale."

"That's the nuisance!" remarked Archibald, shaking his head. "You *never* can be sure, when you start telling a story, whether the person you're telling it to has heard it before. And yet all the difference between a bad story and a good one lies in the fact of the person's having heard it before. Not that I go in for stories. My—what d'ye call it?—speciality's jokes. Look here, shall I tell you about my collection? I haven't been able to tell anyone for a week. Roden—that's a fellow up at the 'Parry'—says he hates puns."

"I love them," said the Baroness, sitting down also. After all, a lord is a lord, especially at Mont' Carlo. There were a good many people on the terrace.

"You're not afraid of a man with a hobby?" continued the engaging youth.

"On the contrary, I think he is positively refreshing. In these days everybody has only fads."

"Oh!" replied Archie suspiciously. "I suppose that's clever! Well, never mind. But, do you know, I've the finest collection of jest books and comic annuals and funny books of all kinds in England. I began it at Oxford. I've got more than four thousand numbers in my catalogue—four thousand three hundred and seventy-three, up to yesterday. It's largely modern: I don't go in for history much: their pictures are so poor, and our ancestors didn't seem to have much idea what a real good joke was. My tutor at Oxford tried to get me to look at an old Latin chap called *Microbius*—all the puns of the ancient Romans in a bushel—but, dear me, it was awfully slow! Do you like Joe Millers?"

"I have never met him," answered the Baroness, whose eyes were wandering.

Young Lord Archibald screamed with laughter. "Oh, I say," he cried, "that's better than Columbus! Well, talking of my collection, the pity is, one can't carry it about with one. When a fellow's in the dumps, you couldn't imagine the comfort it is to go in and have a look at the lot—why, just reading the titles is better than a brandy and soda!" His voice sank to a note of true feeling. He sighed.

"It can't be helped," he said. "I haven't got money enough to live in England."

"What you want is a rich wife!" said the Baroness briskly.

A swift twinkle sprang into Lord Archie's small eyes. "Yes, indeed!" he said.

"I know just the wife to suit you," continued the Frenchwoman. Love and money-making forming the entire complexus of her being, she imagined them to be everybody's ever-present occupation. Dorothea, having brought no fortune with her, must be got rid of at once, for the Baroness, who had reckoned on obtaining an immediate slice of the Brodryck property, as a sort of composition, was bent on marrying the Colonel, rich or poor, and dreaded every hour of delay.

"Do tell me about her," said Archie, twinkling more and more.

"She is young, handsome, charming, rich. And she is, what you young men like in marriage, very good. Your cousin, Miss Sandring."

"Sunday School," replied Archie. "I'm afraid she wouldn't do for a reprobate like me."

Madame bit her stupid lips. "That is so like you English," she cried. "You cannot imagine a woman being good, but at once you must make her *dévoté*. A Frenchwoman can go in the morning to mass, and spend her evening happily at the Folies Bergère."

"Does Miss Sandring spend her evenings at the Folies Bergère?" inquired Archie. "Well, you've given me her good points. What are her faults?"

"You speak of the young lady as if you were buying a horse, my lord."

Archie, like all practical jokers, detested being snubbed. He got up. "That's Sandring at the other end," he said, "is it not? The jolly-looking chap in the tweeds. Let's go and ask him to give me his daughter."

Colonel Sandring expressed no satisfaction at sight of his young relative, but he offered him a cigarette. He could not do less for any man.

"You must present me to your daughter," said Lord Archibald presently. "The Baroness tells me she is charming."

Colonel Sandring lazily drooped his eyelashes towards Madame Blanche de Fleuryse.

"The Baroness was even so flattering to me as to suggest that I might aspire to the honour of Miss Sandring's hand." Archie's face was preternaturally solemn. "How clumsy he is!" thought the Baroness. The Colonel's eyelids closed still more.

"On *my* side there could only be one difficulty, but it's rather an awkward one, isn't it, Sandring? You see, madame, I've been married for a couple of years!"

"Idiot!" said Madame's large, expressive eyes, but her lips spake gently: "Well, mine was, in itself, a most excellent combination, for what, after all, do you English seek in marriage but to buy money and sell rank?" Thereupon she marched away, with the honours of war.

Archie ran after her. "I say, Baroness," he cried, "you don't mind my using your two jokes in my collection?"

"What jokes?" demanded Blanche, frowning round.

"The stale egg and Joe Millers," replied my lord, unabashed. "I'm making an absolutely original book for publication. No joke goes in that's been published before. You can't think what a lot it takes of—what d'ye call it?—collating."

"You are welcome to my poor contribution," said the Baroness with magnificent disdain.

"You—you're quite sure they're your own?"

The Baroness vouchsafed no reply, but sailed off.

"Yes, women are devilish ticklish to handle," said the Colonel, as Archie came back to him.

"Do you think so? I have always found them quite easy," replied the young man.

"No, I didn't laugh," answered Sandring. Archibald stared at him.

"Is Lady Archibald with you?"

"Oh, yes, we've never been separated a day since our marriage. We simply adore one another."

The adverb greatly pleased the Colonel, but he said nothing at all.

"We're staying at the 'Parry.' There are some awfully

jolly people at the 'Parry'—two Germans, for instance, an uncle and nephew called Roden. Why don't you come and stay at the 'Parry?'"

"My daughter prefers Nice. I remember meeting a General von Roden at the autumn manoeuvres."

"Why, that must be young Roden's father—he's up at Cimiez with his womenkind, ill. Fancy your knowing them! I wasn't aware you were an English colonel, Sandring."

"Nor am I," replied Sandring shortly. "I sold out as captain, and went where a man is a man and not somebody's nephew. The Roden I speak of was brother to Count Roden-Rheyna."

"That's the fellow, the uncle—Egon calls him 'the Head.' They're heavy swells, I believe, in their part of the world."

"There spoke the son of the English marquis, both in the admission and in the limitation. They are swells, my dear child, all the world over. Does that matter much?"

"You needn't chaff me," said Archie.

"On the contrary. Your view is my own. An English aristocrat is the noblest work of God. Second-best, though a long way behind, comes a foreign ditto. By the way, did you ever see an Eastern beggar?"

"I say, it's a beastly shame your going on calling me a snob like this!" cried Archie with burning cheeks, "when you're aware that I married a foreigner, and she not a swell, Heaven knows!"

The Colonel's brown face grew darker also. "Do you know," he said frankly, "you are right: I am wrong. Something you said just now vexed me; and I stupidly hit back." All my stock of wisdom consists of half a dozen maxims that I haven't even the wit to remember when I need them."

"Well, you see," replied Archibald, immediately mollified, "I'm a lot of things I ought not to be, but I really am *not* a snob. And the Baroness has been riling me too."

"Live outside a society you used to belong to, and you're bound to abuse it," said the Colonel, still with the same calm frankness. "But I shall have to alter my ways just a little now, for my daughter's sake, if I can. I think I might call on the General."

"That is young Roden over there with my wife; let us go and speak to them," suggested Archie charitably.

The Colonel, as they strolled across, looked down on his innocent companion with a shade of self-reproach. For,

indeed, every one (inside England) knows what Lord Archibald had been and gone and done a couple of years ago at Kissingen. How he had pleasantly diversified the monotony of his mother's gout-cure there, by running away on his twenty-first birthday with a little German waitress whose position he immediately legalised in the teeth of—everybody. Archibald had always been a good boy; his mother had loved him; his governess had kissed him; his friends at Oxford had called him "The Vestal." He had early shown a weakness for apple-pie beds and booby traps and cobblers' wax, but nobody had ever expected such a practical joke as *this*! Every one (in England) knows what sort of a liver Lord Brassingham was. We can understand his fury: he allows his fourth son a few hundreds a year, which the latter spends abroad.

The Colonel enveloped Lady Archibald in one of those rapid long glances of his which seemed to have looked you all over before you could say he had stared at you. Her pearly pinkness was just of the kind which, especially in a waitress, would naturally suggest Hebe to young twenty-one. She was golden-haired, plump, fluffy, dimpled, and she had a loud, jolly laugh. The Colonel immediately saw her at forty, and he felt a humane satisfaction that his youthful connection would never be found among the prophets, in fact could by no means be got to see farther than the length of his very short nose.

"This," said Archie, "is Herr von Roden."

"You are very like your father," said the Colonel. "In the army, I suppose, like him?"—for the young German's military shoulders seemed naturally to suggest the remark.

"No, I am not in the army; I am glad you think me like my father," replied the German in a foreigner's careful English. The Colonel perceived on the Foyes' good-natured faces that somehow he must have committed some very dreadful blunder. He smiled to himself; he was hardened against social blunders, but the next moment, as they all moved towards the restaurant, the smile gave way to a stab of pain, for he saw that the stalwart German limped.

"I am quite sure the Lord General also—he must be charming," declared the high-pitched voice of Lady Archibald. "Archie said, only this morning, this young Herr von Roden is a tile!"

Von Roden, on in front with the husband, did not turn, but Archibald stopped and roared. "She means 'brick'!"

cried Archibald. "Oh, Dickie, you idiot, don't you remember when the old Count's hat blew off the other day, I told you he had a tile loose, and you went and told him!"

"Archibald, you do this thing of purpose; of purpose you hold me for a fool," cried his noble consort wrathfully. Her accent was atrocious. The Colonel saw at once that, lost in the mysteries of German etiquette, not knowing how to behave, the young waitress had wisely resolved not to behave at all. Also he soon remarked that her admiration for her compatriot was not merely a tribute of the lips; and he wondered if this young Teuton was the sort of man who likes a woman to say he is charming. Few of us do, though all of us like her to be charmed.

"If you do this thing again," continued Lady Archibald, "I will not translate to you the *Fliegende Blaetter* when they come."

"Don't be nasty," replied her spouse—his formula for settling all conjugal disputes. They sat down to tea at one of the little tables on the square, and presently the Colonel rose to depart, Archie offering to see him to the station.

"Go see the Lord General!" my lady cried after Sandring. "Tell him we retain here his son as our prisoner of war!"

"Don't you tell her, for Heaven's sake," gasped Archie, "about the Lord General! You can't think what an hourly delight he is to me. I'm teaching her English—by Jove, you would laugh—but she's found out the Lord General all for herself."

"I should be loth," replied the Colonel gravely, "to deprive any living creature of the faintest amusement. Still, I shouldn't make too much fun, if I were you, of that young German's relations. He doesn't look as if he'd take it kindly. Germans have such odd ways of receiving an insult—at the sword's point."

"Oh, Egon's a tile," replied Archie.

"Yes, you are our prisoner of war," said Lady Archibald, lapsing at once into her own vernacular and turning on von Roden the full battery of her forget-me-not eyes.

Von Roden smiled. "A willing prisoner," he answered, "unarmed and harmless. The position is inglorious and secure."

Lady Archibald frowned. "Ah, you have not forgotten

our conversation of last night," she said. "I told you last night that my ideal hero was a conqueror who had never known defeat."

"I admire your ideals from a distance, *Meine Gnaedigste*. I am not a soldier, as the English Colonel has just inadvertently reminded us. I have never known attack, and have therefore never known defeat."

She rose at once, with a great clanging of cups on the table. "How chilly it is!" she said. "See me across to the hotel." As they threaded their way amongst the crowd, Lord Archibald's loud little figure came in sight, twisting down through the gardens with the Colonel.

"Poor Archie!" said my lady.

"Surely you are mistaken; he is the happiest of men."

"Is he? I hope so. But happiness is very monotonous. I?—I have boundless capacities for enjoyment. Life is so short; to me it seems criminal to let one chance of pleasure escape."

"You cannot possibly be unhappy," he answered,

"Unhappy? No—you talk as if I were an applicant for poor relief. But I might have a great deal more enjoyment. So might all of us, if men were not such fools."

"They are fools; there is no more to be said."

She stood still, by the wide hotel steps. "When I was a little girl at our village school," she said, "we learnt a little poem—I believe all children learn it—about a forget-me-not on the top of a wall and a violet at the bottom, that cried because they couldn't meet. Do you remember?"

"Yes."

"A boy came along and picked them both and bound them to a posy. One of those boys they call Cupids, I suppose. It was a stupid little poem." She looked up at him, with her saucy light eyes, her golden head haloed in her white parasol.

"The forget-me-not is a beautiful flower," he said, gazing straight into her own pallid depths of blue, "but it never would match with the violet."

"As a matter of fact, I detest violets," answered Lady Archibald quickly.

"They are a feminine bloom," he answered boldly, and made her a stiff German salute, and ran, limping, away. He amazed Archie by going up to him in the gardens and absurdly gripping his hand.

"What have you done with my wife?" demanded Archie.

"Left her," replied Egon, "at the hotel."

"I say, doesn't she look awfully fetching in that pale blue gown?"

"What is 'fetching'?"

Archie stared at his companion. "You wait till you're fetched," he said.

Colonel Sandring, eager to tell Dorothea of these new acquaintances, found her busy over home letters and letters home.

"I have been telling them how good you are to me," she said, "how happy I am! They need not be afraid I shall want for kindness and care."

"Tut, tut," said the Colonel. "Give them my love, and Em and Doll. I should like to see those cats."

"Em and Doll are uncle Tony's dogs," she answered, laughing. "I've been writing to Mark Lester about my Christmas tree."

"Oh," he said. "Well, this young Roden I was telling you about seems a very nice young chap. I remember greatly liking the father, an excellent type of high-class German. And just the sort of man to have a charming wife. This son looks very much like him."

"What sort of man has a charming wife, father?"

"A very nice fellow, or a brute. Not that I ever knew a man fully good enough to merit a good wife, or one bad enough to quite deserve a bad one."

Dorothea laughed again, but when, many years after, she first recalled her father's words, and first understood them, it was through the same man in connection with whom she had heard them originally uttered—Egon Treuhart von Roden.

CHAPTER VI.

HENCEFORTH the story of Egon Roden blends with the story of Dorothea Sandring.

Thus, suddenly, in the boundless, cloud-filled heavens, two small specks, sailing none knew whither, meet, intermingle, and can never separate again.

Every one who has been to Nice knows, by sight at least, the Villa Buonarotti, that used to be, and perhaps still is, the property of the Prussian Count Riesenthal. It stands half-way up the Cimiez hill, on a terrace, in a great wide spread of luxuriant olives, half-hidden at equal distance from the old road and the new. A long pink house with flat roofs and fancy parapets, and innumerable green shutters, big or little—one of those up and down Italian villas, whose gaudy porticoes and loggias suit the golden southern landscape as no modern brick or stucco palaces can ever aspire to do. There was a time, not a dozen brief years ago, when the leafy solitudes of the lovely hill of Cimiez afforded shelter to many thousand singing birds, and also to a few score favoured strangers who had perched secluded nests between the olives, where they too could dwell in quietness among God's beasts and flowers. Occasionally, perhaps, as you wandered along the rippling rivulets that babbled* to themselves in idly listening glades, or turned swiftly up crooked paths that drew you unconsciously higher, you would hear the tinkle of descending bells and come upon a swarthy countryman, thoughtfully wending downwards beside his laden ass. In those times they still gave you good-day, as they passed on their way among the oil trees. And even if they who disturbed your solitary musings were tourists that had ridden up to see the lofty convent, or picnic in the Roman ruins—if these passed you on their solemn donkeys, with discordant screams and laughter—well, it was only a moment's sight of pretty English faces and a ring of happy voices—the

solitude seemed all the sweeter when that vision of Nice hotels had died away into the depths. To-day all these things are abundantly changed. The trees have been cut down: the sensible birds are fled. Up the naked hill-side stretches, wide and white and bare, in a glitter of scorching sun and a whirl of unresting dust, the great, the magnificent boulevard, flanked by modern building-monstrosities of every inventable northern unsuitability, loud with electrical trams and tooting imitation coaches, and hideous with the clang of whips. Up it goes, straight to the six-floor hotel at the top, the splendid Regina Palace. In our days of middle-class supremacy, we dub our new lodging-houses "Palaces," that King Snob, for a guinea a day, may fancy himself to possess some few gilded inches of royalty. And, indeed, 'tis an excellent plan, affording much innocent gratification; so we stamp the hotel sheets and candlesticks with the same royal cipher and coronet, that King Snob, as he sinks to his slumbers, may dream that he snores (like his constitutional compeers) on a throne.

Prince 'Arry and Princess 'Arriet, had they accidentally strolled in those far-away days to the gates of the Villa Buonarotti, would certainly have turned back in contempt. The widely straggling garden, grey untidiness, flower-bespangled under dark green cypress and palm trees, bespoke not the plentiful wage of the artificer, nor the medals of the show-loving tradesman, retired. Its beauties had been largely left to Nature, in a country where Nature has not lost her free hand. Great blossoms of scarlet geranium, against leaves every shade of green, russet and golden, spread, heavily massed, down the dusty stone walls. The banksia and the wisteria, interwoven, covered one whole south front of the stables, hanging like a wonderful Eastern embroidery of lilac and yellow. A little beyond, Crimson Rambler and Eglantine roses flung their clear stains of colour against the dark pall of the ivy: in the garden itself, starred narcissus and shiny jonquils, soft iris and blazing anemone, bloomed, self-sown, anyhow, in patches, under the benevolence of God. At the back, almost hidden from the road, lay the house, with the steep olive orchards rising behind it.

When Count Riesenthal lent this villa to his old friend and comrade, General von Roden, suddenly invalided, he could not have chosen a fitter tenant for the place. "It is absolutely perfect," cried the whole family on arriving, a

verdict they would scarcely have hit upon, had the owner repainted the walls to receive them.

And the Rodens were judges of beauty. All their lives long they had submitted to its influence, developed in its atmosphere. Justus von Roden, the father, the General, was a practical philosopher, a disciple of Goethe: with open eyes and calm resolve, his own lofty soul had accepted in his youth the theory of the unity on earth of the good, the true and the beautiful in perfect harmony of matter and mind. If goodness, then, was a source, inevitable, of beauty: beauty as certainly brought forth good. It is told of Goethe that, as a little child, he was once found weeping bitterly, and could give no other explanation of his grief than the ugliness of the little girl he had been desired to play with. Such almost physical suffering from deformity, such passionate need of symmetric development, have nothing in common with art twaddle and æsthetic pose, of both which, in fact, they soon become the natural negation. The classic up-building of the outer and inner temple mercilessly demands the excision of many excrescences dear to the heart of the amateur self-decorator. Goethe has been called the great modern pagan. Every such effacement of history is of course a psychologic absurdity, which contains an indication of sense. The student gazed from afar at the greatness of the master, and struggled to absorb a reflected portion of it into his blood. As far as is possible in an up-to-date cavalry officer, the soul of Justus von Roden was the soul of an ancient Greek.

He had entered the army as a matter of course, and had given himself, body and soul, to the love of his profession. He had suffered, unconsciously, for his unspoken creed. His brother had got him the post of adjutant to a black-guard royal highness, and Justus had declined the honour. Count Roden-Rheyna protested. "Why, his whole life is filled up with courtesans!" cried Justus. "I couldn't live in an atmosphere as disgusting as that!" The elder brother smiled; "Justus, you are a wise fool," he said, and left him.

But the courtier let fall the adjective when Justus refused to be wed to a wealthy cousin, simply because she was plain, and married a beautiful little woman whom he loved to distraction. It took some time before the Count, a cheerful cynic, compelled by what he saw of his sister-in-law's household, once more picked up the qualification

and affixed it to his estimate of her husband's visible folly. Wise fool or not, Justus undoubtedly succeeded, both objectively and subjectively, in life, and the titles of "Don Quixote," which his brother cadets, and "Bayard," which his brother subalterns had bestowed on him, began to look out of place in the sedate prosperity of his later career. Chivalry and courage are not things a man's character ever loses, but they sink back with time, like a melting boss of metal, and silently cover the whole. He became commanding officer of a crack regiment, one of the best. His superiors knew him to be an excellent soldier; their only objection to him, in his lofty position, was that he might have been a little better acquainted with the young life of garrison towns. His officers said he was a firm disciplinarian, but a man who could always be taken in once by whoever chose to tell him a lie. A certain number of adversaries he had: they were the people who had speculated on his simplicity or on his kindness, and whom he had found out.

"Life is beautiful: God is good," said the Frau Generalin. That was all her philosophy, and it sounds exceedingly simple until you try it. True, she had not many clogs on her heavenward course. But sooner or later, the sudden upset comes to even the brightest admirers of the journey. It is picking-up time that we have to judge our soul's health by.

Her children were strong, happy, and handsomer than most. They adored her as the light of their home. All her friends contradicted her contention that she was not made to shine in society. She avoided it for the not unusual reason that it clamoured to possess her. She was a pretty, pleasant woman, whose touch left a lingering brightness on everything she passed. A superb musician also: perhaps it was on that account that, in all her quiet daily doings, she never seemed to strike a discord. And her eyes had in them that silent helpfulness which causes a little child to nestle close.

Ah, what a home! Nothing of it is left now, so much the better! The house has been turned into a local museum: the rooms in which the Roden children laughed and played are bare and boring, with their whitewashed walls and hollow cases, containing skeletons and empty Roman wine-jars and eyeless skulls. Nobody ever goes to look at them.

From the pleasant, old-fashioned town of Bonn the broad, bright high-road to Coblenz sweeps away, beside the most majestic river, to the distant hill which lifts aloft the ruined tower of Godesberg. On that stately high-road, in the line of rich men's mansions, a big, old-fashioned dwelling-house falls back behind a field of straggling fruit-trees—apricots and cherries—half-hidden in untidy foliage, midway towards the grey stretch of solemn water, with the haze of the Seven Mountains and Drachenfels beyond. All the poetry of the serious North, darker, browner, stronger, as the face of a man. The music, not of sun-lit cymbals or the singing love-guitar, but the tone of a church-built organ, slowly praising God.

In this braver Arcady the Roden children grew up to a love of all things lightly beautiful. Throughout the Rhineland summer a peaceful Nature lapped them in loose content. Their garden, cool with radiant Northern verdure, sloped down to the sleepy river which curves here, in wide embrasure, like a lake. The farther shore called vaguely from the sun-mist; beyond, reposeful, filling the horizon, arose the gentle outlines of the hills. At any moment, when the glare of noon lay on the water, or when the purple shadows fell at sunset, the dabbling boat, awakened on the beach, might lure you down the garden-steps into an instant fairy-land. For there, immediate, within ten strokes of the eager oar, ten laughs of the rippling sail, hung around you, far and near, the never-dying romance of the German river; from the slopes and valleys, clothed with vine, the songs of a songful people echoed across the water; from rocks above and caves beneath came the answering music of the maidens whom all may hear, but none, would they live, must hope to see. At evening, in the solemn, star-lit silence; you could catch the glimmer of their locks, a distant dream, deep down in awe-struck haunts of stillness where the gleaming treasures lie, or far above on the watchful peaks where the old-time dragons lived and died. And you sing, in your gay young heart, of minstrels and knights, brave, simple and loving, such as the shabby world will never behold again (yet, after all, father is very like them); you sing, in your golden glamour, you sing—till a throbbing steamboat rustles down the middle, laden with laughter, and brass-band blare, and shouting, that break the old-world spell.

There were four Roden children. Egon, Gertrude, Konrad, and Karl. Of these Egon, the eldest, was most open to the impressions of Rhineland scenery and legend, healthy dreams and romance. Gertrude delighted her father by following him into the realms of exact science and investigation of Nature; chemistry, mathematical computations, the microscope. Konrad looked after himself, and Karl after numberless rabbits, pigeons, guinea-pigs, a menagerie of pets.

In the winter, art gave more than Nature could withhold. The city whose chief glory is Beethoven has never neglected fittest homage to his name. At all its street corners flowed streams of purest melody: any that listed could gather to drink. To the open temple, of gloomy winter evenings, trudged the weary housewife, her needlework still in her hands. She settled herself in a quiet corner, and, while she worked, harmonious thoughts swelled through her soul, as in a house of prayer. She sat through a symphony as through a sermon: only, she listened. And if lessons were done, the children went with her, paying a few pence for the lot. On rainy Sunday afternoons the statues, white against museum windows, seemed to beckon towards the gaping portals and tempt you to loiter between the gods and goddesses that are not dead, as the ignorant deem, but alive. Beauty was everywhere, not the least at home, in the home-loving music circle, beside father's two exquisite Correggios and the soft Claude Lorraine. Ah, the exquisite three pictures in the sitting-room, the daily delight! Ugliness also, of course, we well know to be co-existent, a lessening shadow—not, though some erroneously thus would conceive it, a growing eclipse of the sun!

"It's all just an effect of light and shade," declared Roden; "Adam and Eve in Paradise must have felt rather stupidly happy without properly knowing why."

"Go away, Justus!" replied his wife, looking up from her busy preserve-making amongst her pink-armed hand-maidens. "All the trouble came of Eve's having nothing to do of mornings. Had she had Cain and Abel to wash and dress, *inside* Paradise, the whole family would never have found themselves outside. It's a mortal pity that the working in the sweat of the brow didn't come as a blessing; it would have kept off the curse."

The big officer laughed, and stood gazing tenderly at a flushed little tyrant, in frills. "All I can say is, I am glad

we were turned out," he replied; "we want Paradise at the *other* end of life's journey."

"Had Eve been a mother," persisted the little lady, "she would never have forgotten she was setting an example!"

The two maids had gone to fetch more baskets of bilberries, so he kissed her on the neck, just over the huge muslin bow of her apron. "You grow monotonous," he said, "with your all-pervading 'example.' She set it, afterwards, to Cain, as well as to Abel!"

'You can glad your child, or grieve it!
You can help it or deceive it;
When all's done
Beneath God's sun,
You can only love and leave it.'

"For a man who knows more poetry than any other officer in the King's army, Justus, you might vary your quotations more!"

"Pooh!" replied Justus, "I have only one other:

"Mit Gott für König und Vaterland."

Amongst these surroundings and teachings young Egon grew up. He went to the big Royal Grammar School with five hundred other boys, and learnt much Latin and Greek and still more Universal History. Also he skated and canoed and rode and did constant military gymnastics. Moreover, he spent most of his free time in sword exercise and reading poetry. In one word, his was the complete education—and very perfect it is—of the well-born German "Gymnasiast."

Nature had graced him with a simple heart, but of course he could not remain ignorant of the fact that he belonged to the proudest of Protestant aristocracies. "Never refer to it: never forget it," said Justus to his sons. He taught them many things. That every woman, for instance, was pure and good, unless in some rare instance a man had made her otherwise. Count Roden-Rheyne said that, really, Justus was not fit to have young men under him.

You cannot forget the pride of birth amongst the King's Hussars. Nor can you believe yourself an ordinary mortal, if you go to spend an annual month with your uncle Charles at Rheyne. At that ancestral castle, a great, flat house,

among great, flat fields, Count Roden passed his bachelor existence—or at least seven annual months of it—amongst the semi-feudal pomp to which he had been born. The cheerful children, coming from the vine-clad Rhineland, saw the solemn Mark like a dream of Iron Fritz. Here was no Lorelei music, no bottled sunlight, no mountain background: here was stately Prussian strength, cold loftiness, wide space. The vast-fronted house, with its pillared entrance, was rococo, in clumsy curves and gables, lacking the easeful grace of the same French style: the furniture, full of large silk flowers, was rococo: the gardens were rococo, of the period when nymphs and naiads wore powder, well-born, not divine. The fountains and statues, greatly the worse for wear in that inclement climate, looked obtrusively unclothed beneath the grimy sky: the woods hung heavy: the fields sank dark. The country people, stumbling to their gaunt white churches, seemed carved out of ancient oak. Hearts and backs of oak, indeed: and hands that struck hard, but fair. An honest, straight-faced peasantry, with little thought for what is light or lovely. "They are fifty years behind!" declared Justus. "Thank Heaven!" responded his brother, the courtier, who was very much up-to-date.

Here then, in this large domain of heath and farms and villages, the Roden children ruled, submissive only to their feudal lord and uncle, from under whose dread eyes you early slipped away. The villagers, the labourers, the school-lads, bent their sturdy necks, with steadfast front. In all things they obeyed their natural lords, except in things unnatural.

It was Hans, the huntsman's son, who taught Egon that life-long lesson. Hans, the Junker's trusty henchman, comrade and familiar friend. Hans, who crept through all the weary winter months with vision fixed on that bright break in August. Hans, the sturdy, yellow-haired, red-cheeked peasant boy, who was all respectful attention before the master's front and all reckless adventure behind it. Hans, who was never known to hang back from a jump, or a climb, or any sort of danger; who never said "he'd rather not," like Egon's brother, Konrad. Countless were the scrapes and sports and good services of Hans. He knew everything that any sensible creature would care to know. He was strong as a lion, and faithful as a sheep-dog, and no boy in all the universe could do with his hands

what Hans did (with or without the aid of his old clasp-knife). On the evening when that long-suffering blade snapped across, Egon walked home in sadness: desolation lay over the trees and the hedges: he felt that a power had gone out of the world.

But the resources of Hans were endless, and Egon put faith in them. Even knifeless, Hans was stronger, braver, ay, and wiser, than all the knivèd knaves of Christendom—once you believed in him fully, he was bound to prove, however things might seem to turn against him, right in his opinion, straight in his conclusions, true in his advice. At the age of twelve he had flung himself into the mere one day and extracted the helpless Egon (aged ten). A year before that he had taken, unasked, a thrashing for the murder of chickens whom Egon's pop-gun had slain. He had presented his tame raven to Egon, on the day of the latter's departure, and Egon had forgotten to give the bird water, and it died. Egon had written an unvarnished confession, and Hans had forgiven. There were many brave heroes in history and legend to whom Egon's warm impulses vowed changeful admiration, but steadfast was the glory of Hans. For who could do justice to his infinite variety? Unconsciously the soul of the public-schoolboy knit itself into that of the keeper's son.

Was it, then, not a "shrieking shame," as the Roden children would have called it, suddenly to find things altered one summer, and Hans at work in the stables? Had Egon not written twice in the spring about his fishing-tackle, and the new rod, and what bait he had better order from London? And here was a youth of fifteen, with an air of insufferable importance, red and perspiring, day after day, over bits of bright metal and harness!

In that long, lovely August there came a loveliest morning, when the thing could no longer be endured. Across the big grey courtyard, with its slants of splendid sunlight, a few pigeons strutted, lazily pecking; the white peacocks, great fountains of silver, preened their feathers on the terrace. The call of birds was everywhere: the leaves of the mighty chestnuts thrilled with warmth and happiness. All Nature was an immense invitation to come forth.

Hans stood at work in the coach-house door; you could hear his bright whistle across the yard. Egon, who had been dawdling about, and pulling the dogs' tails, suddenly marched up to him.

"Look here, Hans, you promised," he said in accents full of business.

"Yes, Junker?" There was a slight touch of interrogation in the voice, a faint asking for further information, which sounded maddening.

"You did: it's a beastly shame. I shouldn't have bought this tackle if I'd known." And he held out his fishing things: the delightful contemplation of many slow hours at school.

"Yes, but you see, I've been put into the stables, and——"

"Hang it all, I know that, but still——"

"And coachman says, please, Junker, the last boy (that's Friedrich Putz) was turned away for playing truant."

"Are you coming, or are you not?" How temptingly the white sun laughed down across the castle courtyard! How cool it would be in the Nether Wood, beneath the weeping willows, where the perch sank under the weeds!

Hans lovingly hung up a glowing strap and stood watching its light and shade. "Don't you see I can't?" he said.

"You might give a fellow an answer?"

Hans turned to his young master with amazement. "Why, I *have* answered! No."

The fishing-rod leaped up in Egon's hand and struck the other full across the face. Presently he was lying on his back in the woods, gasping for breath and abusing Hans. He lay there for a long time, and first called Hans many ugly names, and latterly himself. It was nearly midday before he once more stole into the stable-yard. Not a human soul was in sight, but all the pigeons were there. The pigeons looked at him curiously, and one of the peacocks got up.

Hans still stood hard at work, in silence, an ugly purple mark across his bright red cheeks.

"Hans, I'm a cad," said Egon.

Hans showed no immediate eagerness to dispute the proposition.

"A low cad," said Egon, flushing.

"Very well, Junker, we'll say no more about it. Of course I forgive you, but you shouldn't hit people that can't hit you back."

"Hit me back," replied Egon quickly. "By Jove, I wish you would!"

Did he expect the thing to happen? He doesn't know.

Certain it is that the stable-boy flashed down upon him and struck him, with his own weapon, a couple of blows across the shoulders. Breathless the boys faced each other. That remains the only beating Egon Roden ever received.

"You're bigger'n me," rose to Egon's lips, but he bit back the words, steadfastly staring at his hero.

Then, slowly, Hans Stormer stood to attention, like a soldier, both hands falling stiff against his thighs. "Now, Junker, you must tell my Lord Count," he said, "and they'll shoot me."

"Like they shot the wicked seneschal," he continued, with feudal reminiscence. "I thought of that," he added, and a touch of pride broke across his respectful tone, "but I'd rather be shot, Junker Egon, than never like you again."

"Shake hands," said Egon, saving the situation. "I say, Hans, you needn't have hit so hard."

"Hard?" The grin on Hans's features spread so broad that it broke on Egon's. "You just try father," said Hans.

"Thanks. And I say, Hans, you needn't tell any one you've licked me."

The stable-boy's brow clouded over. "I do believe you think I'm a brute beast of a blackguard," he said energetically. "Besides, now if you like you can thrash me dead."

But Hans lived on, and Egon sought such poor consolation as Nature could afford him in the companionship of his sister Gertrude and his brothers Konrad and Karl. Egon had early declared that he thought Konrad a muff and a sneak: to this judgment Hans had only proffered perfunctory objections, and it soon became an appreciation, which need not be repeated, but must still remain regretfully understood. Konrad was a healthy, happy youth, who took things coolly. He even coolly took things that belonged to Egon, and the other scornfully let him. It was no use telling him that the Good, the True, and the Beautiful were one, for he only answered: "S'ist mir Alles eins." When the Generalin sighed, her husband's thoughts reverted to Cain and Abel. But Konrad had his advantages: he played the violin almost as well as Egon sang, so that he was not out of place in the Roden family. Though not so good a horseman, he was a better shot. None of his relations ever got to know that he pulled out the wings of flies. He used to lock his bedroom door when he did it, and once, upon his father happening to call to him, he declared

that he was saying his prayers. Well, there are various kinds of offering worship to various deities. "Say your prayers in the morning," said the General curtly. One wonders what would have happened if the others *had* known! But Konrad peered at petals and things under the microscope with the rest. "Yes, father," he said obediently, "the colouring is beautiful. Oh, how beautiful the colouring is!" Once the General offered a penny to whoever should first bring him the wing of a dragon-fly. All the children sought long in vain, and Konrad bided his time. But, when Egon came home from school and said that a fellow had given him one, Konrad immediately rushed to the General's room and laid *his* wing on the writing-table. "I found it dead, behind the hot-house," gasped Konrad, clutching his penny. Egon looked at him; but Egon, even at that age—nine—had learnt from his father to want double proof of guilt.

Still, "He's a sneak," said Egon, for, like most of the boys at the Grammar School, Egon saw black and white. Konrad could distinguish a variety of twilights, careful to keep out of the shade. The younger brother disliked his elder, because the elder laughed when Konrad fell off the pony. At least, that was the reason to which he owed. The brown pony with the switchy tail, the irritable cob with the mottled patch—of supreme interest were these in the young people's daily lives. You tumbled about amongst horses all day if you lived with King's Hussars. And if you are brought up to appreciate the beauties of creation, surely you may naturally concentrate your interest on the beautifullest beauty of them all!

Nor can you grow to young manhood amongst the laughing Rhinelanders and not feel an awakening sympathy for the second fairest thing in creation, the sisters of the other boys. Not with impunity do you read the language of Schiller, in class, and of Heine, in your lazy, half-hidden canoe, on the rippling summer water. Officially a certain amount of "Schwärmerei" is prescribed in your military education; you cannot avoid it, if you would. Its exuberance will die down as you escape from your teens, but it will leave a soft point at your heart, to which rougher nations remain willing strangers.

"Like rheumatic fever," says the scoffer.

When Egon von Roden spoke of himself as unwounded, he certainly did not mean to disclaim calf-like stirrings

towards the tresses of Gretchen or the tilted nose of Marie. Like all his fellows, he had stood waiting, in a downpour, to see one of these young ladies come out of school. He had treated Mariechen to innumerable strawberry ices—her “ideal”; half-a-dozen on a heavenly half-holiday, with a terrible morrow of parental inquiry! she very nearly died of his love. What paleozoic fossils of folly are these? He was not yet out of his teens when a graver experience befell him, that suffused his whole future career. He had gone to Rheyna, on leaving the “Gymnasium,” to prepare for his one possible profession, the army, and Hans had been especially attached to his service. The two young men were faster friends than ever, but with the nascent reserve of grown-ups. Hans, nearly twenty, had long learnt that patient responsibility towards life which awakes so much earlier in the graver children of the people.

One evening they were riding, for the hundredth time, together up the pine-glade that winds along the babbling torrent from Rheyna village to Rheyna castle—the Side-way, men call it: ah, thou knowest it, heart of my heart! 'Twas a still summer evening, rich with contentment, and the sense of much labour accomplished and balmy slumbers approaching in meadow and field.

“Hans, what a beauty my horse is!” said Egon. Indeed, he had reason to say so; he rode the bay mare which his uncle had recently given him—a fortnight ago—because he had accepted the foolhardy challenge of an officer in the neighbouring garrison town, and leaped the mess-table. “A young idiot,” said Count Rheyna, but he gave him the mare. Egon rode her exactly a dozen times, no more.

“A beauty she is,” assented Hans. Firefly, perfectly conscious of commendation, tossed her mane, looking back with both eyes as she foamed over her snaffle and bespattered her lord.

“Hans, there is something I want to say to you. I’ve been wanting to say it for ever so long.”

The servant drew a foot or two forwards, all respectful attention. The horses, in the golden gloaming, played with their ears.

“Come closer! Have you ever noticed, Hans, how pretty Trudchen Schudde is? Goodness, what makes Thora plunge like that?”

“Whoa, my pretty, whoa!” said Hans.

“Why don’t you answer?” demanded Egon.

"Please, I'd rather wait," said Hans, still uncertain. He felt apologetic to his mare for that sudden grip of his lusty young legs which had caused her to leap aside, but he had always thought his secret to be his own.

"She's the prettiest girl I've ever seen," continued the artless Egon, "and I'll tell you what I'm going to do, Hans. I'm going to get up a flirtation with Trudchen Schudde. Oh, honour bright!"

Hans did not answer; he rode, carelessly stroking his horse's neck.

"I saw her this morning in the hay-field; do you know, I rather think she likes me?" persisted the ingenuous youth. "And I told her I'd come to her window to-night for a chat in the moonshine."

"There's no moon," answered Hans, with a touch of spite.

"Oh!—well, we can have the chat all the same, and her father won't see us. It'll be an awful lark, Hans. I never had an adventure of the kind before; and you see, I'm nearly nineteen."

"Eighteen and four months," said Hans. "Junker, if I was you, I shouldn't."

"Why not? It's only a lark; she knows that as well as I."

Hans, suddenly convicted of selfishness, remained silent. They rode on through the lovely twilight, that played in warm waves around them, too tender not to rouse thoughts of love in hearts that were budding with life's spring.

"You can't get up to her window," said Hans, who had often stood under it.

"Can't I?—by Jove, are you sure?"—a long pause—"Look here, be a good chap, Hans; you'll have to come with me and give me a leg up."

"Zu Befehl," said the servant, who had never avoidably disobeyed.

"It's an awful nuisance having you there. You won't listen? You don't mind coming, Hans?"

"I shall try not to listen," replied the henchman.

"Hans, you're a dear good fellow. Hans, you're an ass."

They rode on through the smell of the pine-trees, up the golden-shadowed glade.

"What a beauty she is!" said Egon, and now he meant his mare.

"Yes, Junker; I shouldn't jump *her* over no mess-tables.

Don't you think—mit Verlaub—you sometimes do things that are a bit—over-courageous?”

“I didn't really want to jump the mess-table a bit,” answered Egon frankly, “but what was I to do? There was that idiotic von Rosswitz egging me on and saying that Konrad had said I had said I could do it, and there they were all looking and laughing, and half of them tipsy—well, what could I do? So I jumped.”

“But you never had said you could do it?”

“No; does that make any difference? I couldn't call Konrad a liar. They'd given him too much champagne. I hate a man that gets drunk.”

“Well, then, now—there is Trudchen?”

Firefly gave a proud leap of disgust.

“Do you call that over-courageous? Whom am I to be afraid of? Trudchen's father? Or rivals?”

“No rivals. It's all fair and above board?—you won't kiss her?”

Egon pressed his fretting horse into a gallop. “I shall kiss her, if she lets me. But I'll stop on this side of the window. I won't have her reputation imperilled! Nine o'clock, mind! At the kitchen garden gate!” He dashed up the avenue and into the courtyard; the unclothed statues seemed to totter on the bridge.

At the little kitchen garden gate, the squeaky gate beneath the elms, by the tool-house, Hans awaited his young master in the softly scented night. Velvet darkness hung around him, brightly blue and star-bespangled; the swans that sleep there stirred their wings beneath the placid lines of foliage, and in the lofty masses of the trees a bird chirped here and there.

Hans, aged twenty, felt greatly Egon's senior. He was a man; five long years he had worked for his bread. And his love was a serious matter, a matter of life and death. He felt miserable, but he knew that to treat the whole thing as more than a schoolboy's frolic would have made him immeasurably more miserable still. So he laughed response to young Egon's high spirits. Love-making, after all, is not love.

A ten minutes trudge brought the pair to the clearing in the pine-woods, where lay the forester's cottage, asleep.

“That's her window—with the honeysuckle round it,” said Egon in an awestruck whisper. “I say, help me up! I shall have to stand on your shoulders, Hans.”

"Am I to wait like this, all the time?" suddenly expostulated Jonathan.

"Why, yes; what do you care? Haven't you done it again and again, when we went to get apples? I wish she'd show a light."

"I dare say she's asleep," said Hans.

Egon's feelings permitted no reply to this bit of impertinence. "Here goes; I sha'n't hurt you," he said.

"Oh, no, you—won't—hurt—me," answered Hans, with his back firm-set against the wall. Egon climbed up on to the stalwart shoulders, and the little window opened slowly to his tap.

For ten long minutes Hans held out, vaguely fascinated by the continuous coo above him. Absolute silence reigned around; the whole vast pine forest stood and listened. Not a sound touched its endless profundities; not a ripple of laughter awoke between its solemn stems. Only the young laugh at sweethearts, however silly. The grey old forest, whose heart is unchangeably green, and whose life, in a thousand forms, is a flow of eternal dalliance, oped its eyes and held its breath. Once or twice the expectant Hans shifted his cramped position. "Oh, I say; hold hard," hissed Egon. The boy was amusing himself thoroughly, murmuring a lot of sugary nothings to one who well knew they were sweetly naught.

"Go away now," whispered Trudchen. "Don't be silly, Junker, please!"

But the Junker preferred to be silly,* just for once, in parting—and the music of four lips meeting in highest heaven thrilled gently adown the summer darkness and stole away into farthest abysses of hidden vendure that rippled it on, a long message of delight.

It fell, like a final discord, on the ears of the swain down below. Under its weight—was there grief, indignation, spite, a bit of all three?—Hans lurched forward, lost his balance—Egon swung away from the house-wall; down he came with a crash, with a twist, a sharp snap of something violently breaking; the lover lay prone. In a moment the comedy was tragedy. The window closed hastily; Egon hung on his elbow, gasping, unable to rise. The terrified liegeman dragged his master away under the shadow of the trees.

Presumably Hans knows how he got his burden home, but he has never been able to give a coherent account of

the journey. He knows that they hurriedly brought him a dram in the Castle kitchen, and that he asked for a second, before he could rise to his feet.

It was many weeks before Egon could rise to his feet. "Only a little wrench in the ankle," said the village doctor, "of no importance at all." It was nothing, he said, and perhaps that prevented his seeing it. But there came a professor from Halle, who hurt the patient more than the little country practitioner had done. The parents, summoned from Bonn, stood, grief-stricken, by the bedside—then they too said it was nothing, a matter of weeks. They had never known illness that seriously troubled them; once the children had all had the measles and got well. Fresh doctors, big doctors, at Bonn University declared the foot would be right in no time, and, alas, in no time was it right. After that, every fresh celebrity, considering his predecessor had done something, could say that the case had been bungled. Egon lay tortured by treatments, month after month.

On the day when he left Rheyna he asked Hans to wheel him into the stable and leave him there alone with his horse. The mare turned her big eyes to him, in her sweet-smelling box, astonished at his previous absence, alarmed by his lameness, so terrible to a horse. She distended her nostrils; her eyes were full of pain.

He put his arm round her neck and laid his cheek against the satin of its curve. "My beauty," he whispered, "I shall come back to ride you in the summer; till then you must let Hans do it for me; you must be very good to Hans." And he limped out to his little cart by the stable door, and presently called for Hans with cheerful voice.

"Hans," he said, "don't be a fool. It's no more your fault than Firefly's."

"Indeed it is," answered Hans.

"I tell you 'tis my fault for playing the fool, and nobody else's. Give us your paw!"

Hans muttered something unintelligible. The wind howled round the stable-buildings, for the weather had changed with the season; all vestige of summer had died from the rapidly blackening earth.

"Give us your paw at once! And, look here, I've spoken to my uncle. You can get betrothed to Trudchen Schudde, when you like."

"I hate her," was Hans' unexpected reply

"What in the name of goodness——?"

"I hate her; I hate all women. All the mischief in the world comes from them."

"All the same, you must marry her some day."

"Begging your pardon, Junker, I shall always do whatever you tell me—if it was to throw myself into the Hinterbrook, and gladly!" said poor Hans, looking glummer than ever; "but I'm going to be your servant and wait on you, and I can't be bothered with girls."

"Well, you're in no hurry. You'll have to serve your time first in the army"—both lads winced—"and then——"

"And then I shall be your servant, all my life long. 'Twas my foolish old mother told Trudchen I was sweet on her, or nobody'd ever have known."

"Why, you talk as if I was always to be like this? What nonsense! I shall be all right in a month or two. You'll be my orderly before the next year's out!"

After a month or two of inflicted pain and fostered suspense at home, Count Roden insisted on his brother taking Egon to Paris. Father and son saw the city and returned. "Well, now at least you know the case is hopeless," said Count Roden, who had his fixed ideas and lived up to them. At last Egon understood. Some little strings were torn and no surgeon's skill could heal them. His foot would always remain painful: he must limp.

He rose to that consciousness, the whole splendidly built eighteen years of him, swaying right and left to his father's firm hold of God's wisdom, to his mother's sweet faith in God's love. Nor did they fail him in the supreme moment of agony, these gentle and highly-cultured parents whose dream of life had been a dream of beauty. True, in the first moment, Justus hung back. "I cannot," he said. But the little Generalin put him gently aside and passed into the darkness of Egon's chamber, which the doctor had quitted a couple of hours ago. She felt her way towards the bed on which her eldest son had thrown himself. "My boy," she said gently in that sweet voice of hers, which had never trembled so softly, "I am so sorry, so sorry! Oh, Egon, what else shall I say? So sorry, so sorry."

She knelt beside the bed. "Yes, there is something else I would say," she stammered. "You must not be angry with me, dearest. I want to say this. It sounds utterly idiotic, and yet it is Gospel truth. Some day, in some

distant, *certain* future, perhaps not even here on earth, but in a certain, certain future, you will actually be glad. You will say: God, I thank thee! Does it not sound absurd?"

There was no rejoinder from the bed.

"I can't preach or philosophise," continued the poor mother, "I just want you to try and tell yourself——" She broke down in the darkness, and seized an irresponsible hand. She felt a tall figure beside her, and knew that her husband had found his way to them both.

Egon started up. "Father, I must go into the army!" he cried. "I must! I must!"

It was the General's turn to keep back all vain reply.

"You have always told us that every Prussian must serve his King."

"My boy—my poor boy!" stammered Justus. But the little Generalin had risen: her arms were round husband and son, and her voice was like liquid melody:

"Für Gott mit König und Vaterland!" she said. "Egon—my boy!—you can serve your King."

But Egon von Roden, though he learnt to face down his trouble, by no means always bore it in angelic mood. He flew at Konrad, who had muttered an allusion to "*le diable boiteux*," and licked him in their father's presence, and the General only said: "Stop *now*."

Next summer he settled down as a law-student and went in for "*Jura und Kameralwissenschaften*" at Bonn first and then at Heidelberg. He wore the white and black cap of the aristocratic "*Borussia*," and lived up to the stern, if strange, code of his set. He even came in for one serious pistol encounter, the result of an affront by an officer at the theatre to a lady whom neither antagonist knew. His life was the life of his friends. In all things immaterial he frolicked: in most things material went straight: he was never known to do a low thing, or an unkind thing, and his purse he held open to his numerous friends. He was generally voted a good fellow: his beautiful voice was in great request. He had given "*Firefly*" to Konrad one evening on coming out of the "*Schlosskirche*" with his mother: Count Roden, for reasons locked up in a cynical bosom, sent this maimed nephew a yearly present of money, which the latter expended on works of art. He was known to study art far more willingly than law-books. Still, he passed his big final examination at Berlin, to his

own pleased surprise. He was intended for some great administration, possibly diplomacy, later on.

"I really did almost decently at my *viva voce*," he said to his father; "you cannot imagine what rot it all is!"

The quick leap of satisfaction died out of the General's eyes. "It can't be helped," he said sadly, "I suppose there must be some decent law-people! Moses was a lawgiver. Any fool can make a soldier. And *Bismarck* is a civilian: let us cling to that!"

But some few weeks later the whole household was thrown into direst dismay. For without any warning or preparation the General was suddenly seized with hemorrhage from the lungs, and the professional authorities, with long-drawn faces, immediately ordered him south. All doctors have long been agreed that the icy, dust-laden winds of the Riviera present the best remedy for labouring lungs: nowhere else are obtainable such swift changes of temperature, such curious comminglings of chill and white heat. It was accordingly explained to General von Roden that he must go to the Riviera or else he would die. Most opportunely Count Riesenthal offered the Villa Buonarotti, and thither father, mother and daughter betook themselves, with hearts full of gratitude and hope. Soon after, Egon arrived at Monte Carlo, in attendance on his uncle, the Count. Konrad was "Porte-Epée-Fähnrich" in a crack regiment at Darmstadt. Karl was at Lichterfelde, where he had recently been appointed to the post of a Royal Page.

CHAPTER VII.

"THIS afternoon, then, Madame de Roden expects us," said Colonel Sandring at breakfast, a few days after his first meeting with Egon. "Don't forget, Dolly!"

It was not likely that Dorothea would forget: her countrified self-distrust caused her too much apprehension for that. "I am going up to Cimiez this morning to paint," she said, her thoughts in swift search of a diversion.

"All right, I shall be here at four," said the Colonel. He had often doubted the advisability of breakfasting with his daughter—with any one. After forty we of course look our worst until midday, and Sandring did not like to get up before then. It cost him immense consideration to make this sacrifice to his daughter's companionship, but the arrangement left him free for lunch. "I can afford it," he said to himself, turning from a close contemplation of his wrinkles in the glass. "For the next half a dozen years I can afford it."

Dorothea had recently revived the long-discarded drawing in water-colours which her mild Swiss governess had early communicated to her. The aunts greatly admired it: their niece's fancy landscapes hung all about the house. Her father encouraged her. "Reproduce the beauties of the Riviera, my dear," he said. "Send them to the old ladies at Brodryck." So she used to hire a little white donkey to carry her stool and sketching-things, and trot him about the suburbs, perpetrating pictures.

The donkey, whom a previous lady tourist had christened "Gem," and who therefore answered to the appellations Jem, James ("Shems"), Shem, etc., promiscuously, possessed all the numerous good qualities which dwell in the souls and which speak from the eyes of his kind. The malicious stupidity of man is surely shown in nothing more clearly than in the fact that he has been able to live for countless centuries beside the donkey without learning either sagacity or virtue from the example of that brave little beast. In

untold arrogance man sometimes writes some feebler kinsman down—an ass. At least, then, the poor sharer of our common curse shows himself patient with the brethren, patient in tribulation, patiently running a race that is not to the strong. Oh, the long agony, age after age in the East! Lord, canst Thou endure in Thy heaven the burden of the ass?

The chequered existence of "Shems" ("called after the Prince of England," says his master) recognised too brief periods of uninterrupted sunshine in the hours which he spent with Dorothea. He carried a light weight, for she much preferred walking, and she never pressed him, as they loitered together through miles of leafiness. The former lady, a Miss Smythe-Rodgers (of the Shropshire Smythe-Rodgerses, Parklands, Ealing), had loved the dear little donkey's little shiny round paunch (whence "Gem"), and had given him lumps of sugar, and his master leaflets of the "Soseé-etay days Annie-mow," and had weighed fourteen stone and had ridden him up everything, including the "root de Saint Andry," and had prodded him all the time with the point of her open, inverted parasol. The Gem therefore shivered down to his hoofs whenever he saw a scarlet sunshade. You could hardly coax him past one.

There were no parasols of any kind at that early hour, in the solitude of Cimiez. The donkey wandered up, with little trots of contentment: the young girl behind him thought only of happiness. All the world around her was lovely: she had never seen such luscious, odorous, entrancing vitality as this.

At a spot near the ruins, half hidden in verdure, she stopped, and began to get ready her painting-things. Turning her back on the amphitheatre, she settled down to an exquisite view, through an archway, of hill-side and deep blue sea. It was an ambitious subject, but that did not make much difference to her limited powers. The donkey's bridle trailed lightly over an olive-branch as he nibbled at the grass. The minutes passed rapidly; the sketch progressed favourably: Dorothea, hard at work, heard nothing but the twitter of the birds. A finch, overhead, almost burst with approval—of the sunshine, not of the sketch.

Suddenly a voice, far louder even than the finch's, broke in upon the universal repose. Dorothea started so violently that she dropped a little paint-glass she was cleaning,

and it fell in a splash of brown dirt along her dress. For the voice was a man's voice, close to her, singing.

She peeped between the thick bushes behind her : a few yards off, against the wall of the amphitheatre, a young man stood erect, a couple of ladies beside him. They were gazing with their backs to her, admiring the great circle of the ruins, probably reconstructing from the paltry *débris* thus lost amid foliage on the hill-top that great arena of ancient battle, on whose shoutings and passions the same heavens had smiled long ago. Unexpectedly, to himself as to the others, the young man had broken into song :

"Ave, Cæsar, te salutant morituri !"

It was the grand chorus from the first part of Pulcini's "Martiri." Dorothea knew nothing of this, but she stood listening, spellbound, to finer music than she had ever heard before. The words rose, with all their impressive threatening, and rolled away into the genial sunshine and the sparkling tree-tops overhead.

"Yes, that is splendid," said the younger of the ladies in the awe-filled silence, "but it is overwhelming. Sing us something else, something brighter, Egon !"

The young man turned to his sister, laughing. "Donna è Mobile !" he sang, accompanying the hackneyed words with mimicry worthy of Rigoletto. She flashed up her red sunshade between them, to ward off the persiflage in his movements and face.

Shems, who had stood silently contemplative, rubbing his nose against Dorothea's fingers, shot back at this sudden apparition of his foe. In the abruptness of his retreat he almost sat down on an aloe shaft, which caused him to leap still more rapidly forward, knocking aside Dorothea and dashing round a corner, right away into the middle of the ruins. Dorothea, with great presence of mind, hurried after him to arrest his descent down the high road which runs through the circle. But Shems had no intention of hastening home. He stood still in a wide field of sunlight, opposite the Germans, first kicked out with his hind feet and then lifted up his voice, in wild chorus to the song.

The man's notes stopped immediately : the donkey's went on for some time. On one side of the amphitheatre stood the Germans, laughing outrageously ; the donkey was in the middle ; in the opening of the high road stared Dorothea, distressed. Presently Shems arrested his ancestral cry of protest, waiting, perhaps for applause. It came,

in the shape of fresh, immoderate laughter, in which Dorothea presently joined.

"But what, then, is this?" asked the elder lady.

Dorothea, recalling descriptions, felt almost certain she knew who these terrible laughers must be. "I—I am afraid that is my donkey," said Dorothea.

The girl of the red parasol turned towards her with ready decision. "Then I must help you to catch him," she said. On the brother's brow settled a quick frown of annoyance. "Not you," whispered Gertrude.

"Yes, of course; can I help it?" he answered. He started at a quick limp in the opposite direction to Dorothea, and, had she still felt doubt, it would have vanished at the sight. But Shems, in spite of his good nature, refused to be caught by a man with a limp or a girl with a red parasol.

"I—I'm afraid you will have to shut up that sunshade," gasped Dorothea. "I think I could manage—thanks—if you would kindly go away!" Whereon Egon and she caught the donkey together: in fact, it immediately ran into her arms. "Oh, thank you!" she stammered, her hand on the poor creature's neck. His eyes were looking at her, close, over the donkey's head. She wondered what their expression really was at that moment, how they came to twinkle, keeping so grave.

"I am so sorry!" she began hurriedly, stumbling, red and terrified; in her German, to the Generalin. "I owe you a thousand apologies. I interrupted your singing, and this gentleman sang so beautifully. I mean the donkey did—interrupted, I mean. My name is Miss Sandring; I may as well introduce myself at once, for I believe I am to have the pleasure of calling on you this afternoon with my father. He is so stupid. He is dreadfully afraid of red umbrellas. An old English lady used to prod him with one."

"Indeed?" said the Frau Generalin. "Yes, I am the Frau von Roden, and these are my daughter and son."

"The latter, like your donkey, is afraid of red umbrellas," remarked Gertrude, shaking her own at her brother. "He will not soon mock at womankind again."

"I never did: I never do," protested Egon with vehemence. "Mobility in everyone is an excellent thing."

"Except in an uncaught donkey," said Gertrude.

"He is very good," declared Dorothea, fondling her

beast, "very good and patient. Look, how I can tease him!" She pulled at Shems' ears.

"The comparison still holds good," began Gertrude Roden slyly, but her brother interrupted her, and Dorothea, at this moment catching sight of the mess on her skirt, rather hurriedly departed, with Shems tucked under her arm.

"It's a pity you are going back to lunch at Monte Carlo," said Gertrude, watching the retreating figure. "She seems rather a nice girl."

"No, I shall stay till dinner-time," answered Egon. So he was present at the visit which, now the ice was so thoroughly broken, proved rather a success.

When her guests were gone, the Generalin emitted an opinion: "The daughter is good. I shall befriend her. She as good as asked me to do so."

"I am sorry you did not care for the man," replied her husband. "I believe he is very brave. I cannot believe that a brave man could be a bad one."

"My dear Justus, not a word have I uttered——"

"Just so, Kate; your reticences are your condemnations. For you always turn up to the sunlight every mortal bit of sparkle you perceive in a human heart!"

She got up from her tea-table and walked straight across to him. "Justus, say you are feeling better!" she said.

"A great deal better," he answered, and held her away from him.

"But, if you were better each time that you said it, you'd have been well long ago."

"My dear, I don't think that is grammar," he laughed.

"If only you feel better!—are better!" She put up her lips to kiss him.

"Don't kiss me," he said hastily. "Not on the mouth!" He held her at arm's length.

She sank down with a low moan, bending like a flower that breaks on the stalk; then suddenly, she straightened herself, and threw her arms round his neck and dragged him down. "And if it were the kiss of death!" she gasped.

"Hush, think of the children! the children!"

She stopped, hanging still closer. They stood together, alone, by the great drawing-room window, that opens like a stage-front on the wide panorama beneath them, over slopes ever rippling with laughter, the far city, in white splendour, reposeful, by the sweep of the glittering sea.

All seemed right in God's world. The little Generalin pressed closer yet.

"When my brother dies," said Justus, "think of the complications! You must be there then, to help them all."

"Poor Egon!" she murmured. "It does not seem fair that the eldest should not be the inevitable heir." She felt him shrink ever so little away.

"I do not agree with you at all," he said hurriedly, "It has always been like that; it is the 'house-order.' We have never known any other. It was settled for Egon long before his birth. We have never spoken of it before. I had no idea you thought of it like that, Kate!" His tone showed her how much she had distressed him.

"Hush," she said soothingly. "What does it matter? Your brother is not dead yet; nor are you, thank God!" And then, before he could stop her, she kissed him twice on the lips. "Love laughs at the doctors," she said. "Dear, surely you do not believe all this rubbish about microbes?"

"The doctors——" he began.

"See more, and less clearly, than they saw in the days of Molière. A hundred times you have said so yourself."

"Ah, that was in the days of my health!"

"They know nothing," she said passionately, crying down her own heart. "Nothing! nothing! nothing do they know! When I was seven years old, the doctors declared I could not live through the winter. I have lived through many winters, and through more summers, somehow!" She laughed a sad little laugh, full of tenderness. "So will you!"

"Well——" he said, "we will read a scene or two from 'Le Malade Imaginaire' to-night. It will do us good. Do not let us get lugubrious, whatever we do. Lugubriousness is the only evil that precludes its own cure."

"Justus, that is your new prose quotation," she sighed. "How well I remember your first prose quotation! It came unexpectedly, like your first grey hair."

"Well, it was you that extracted them both!" he made answer. And they both laughed so heartily you might easily have thought all was right in God's world. And so, presumably, it is. In the whole seething, stinking foundry the bell is somehow being cast which will one day ring His praise alone.

Dorothea sat in one of the many cane chairs scattered over the big hotel-vestibule, reviewing the events of her

day. A Tauchnitz lay on her lap, for most people who enjoy doing nothing require a pretence that they don't. In the course of her tea-drinking at the Villa Buonarrotti, Egon Roden had dumbfounded her by asking why she never came to Monte Carlo. From this shock she had not yet recovered; the mere recollection brought the blood to her cheeks. Her father went frequently to *Monaco*, possessed by a regrettable, but alas not unnatural passion for pigeon-shooting; Monte Carlo, she had understood, was a gambling hell which no decent person ever went near. What a strange world was this into which the last fortnight had ushered her! Young men of irreproachable manner insulted you with a smile! A strange world, indeed, in which most of the women were painted, and most of the men were—tarred.

Once, during a fortnight's stay at the Hague, she had been taken to the opera, and had seen "*La Muette de Portici*." She felt now all along as if she were present at a performance, amongst the brilliantly coloured Italian scenery and surroundings, but the performers were all men and women out of novels she had never read.

Her father was full of affectionate consideration, and she must not forget that uncle Tony, kindest of irascible mortals, went mad about sport. A soldier would naturally be more inured than his daughter to the shedding of innocent blood. So the Colonel spent his afternoons, frequently, at Monaco, and in the evenings, he liked to go out. She had accompanied him several times to theatre and opera, but had noticed to her disappointment that the only thing he really cared for was the ballet. Once they went to a classic tragedy together, but he laughed so they had to come away. He, on the other hand, was distinctly put out by her puritan attitude towards the ballet.

"Father, would you like to think of *me* as a ballet-girl?"

"No, Dolly, nor as a cook."

"But would you be ashamed of me as a cook?"

"Undoubtedly."

Alas, he was sometimes decidedly disappointing, this comely, courteous, kindly father. He, that was so brave! She had never reflected on the various forms of cowardice.

So the Colonel went out a good deal alone—well, hardly alone. Dorothea said she liked quiet evenings. She confectioned a lot of Christmas presents for Brodryck, and, anxious to improve her English, amused the Colonel by

asking for classical authors in the bookshops of the Quai Masséna.

"Milton?" said the dapper English shop-assistant, dubiously. "You—you mean the poet—not the prophet?"

"The prophet?"

"Yes; Robert Milton, the sporting prophet of the *Figaro*. We have his book on the turf here; it is selling largely. But of course we can get you out the other man from England." The Colonel laughed all the way home.

Yes, it was a queer world, hard to make sense of. Amongst the rainbow-hued peacocks that strutted—nay, why insult peacocks and rainbows?—amongst the blue and yellow, pink and green creatures that spread, frizzed, furbelowed and farded, all over the Promenade des Anglais, there trotted and stared, in large numbers, the Cook's trippers, with their yellow straw hats and cheap boas, looking really quite refreshingly goody, like shabby little brown-leather hymn-books among a ruck of two-shilling novels that are all gaudy frontispiece and flare.

It was a queer world, intensely delectable. Who could have guessed a few weeks ago at Brodryck that life could be diversified like this? Dorothea, in perfect health of soul and body, wrote delighted epistles to Holland from this enchanted shore. The aunts shook their heads and hoped dear Dorothea was not growing worldly. Uncle Tony wondered that she did not come back.

"I am given to understand," said a lisping voice at Dorothea's elbow, "that I have the honbur of addressing Miss Sandring?" She lifted her eyes from the Tauchnitz on which they had rested; a smile over some bit of the "Tramp Abroad" had not time to die away from her face.

"Young, beautiful and happy—ah!" said the bowing Italian, a tall, thin man with cameo-clear features and a tight-waxed moustache. He put his hand to his breast and again bowed, quite prettily. His manner was graceful, his slightly shabby clothing "soignée." Dorothea, who had never before beheld elegance in a man, felt vaguely impressed.

"Monsieur Pini," said the Italian, "Il Signor Pini. Bartolommeo Pini-Pizzatelli." And he proffered a card. "Professor of Italian, etcetera," read Dorothea. "No, thank you, Monsieur; I can take no lessons." The "etcetera" was redolent of Nice.

"Ah, but we can all take lessons! In everything!"

replied Monsieur Pini. "And when we are young, they are pleasant, ahimé! Yet I aspire not to teaching Miss Sandring the language of Dante! I but came to seek the Colonel. You will permit me to resume my hat?"

"Oh, do please!"

"Mademoiselle, you are too good. The Colonel had made me an appointment. I presume that he has forgotten it. Alas, that is not unnatural!" The pathetic Italian sighed.

"Oh, I am so sorry; pray sit down and wait!" cried Dorothea in swift distress, for the coat of the visitor seemed to have grown suddenly more threadbare. "I will send for some tea——"

"Nay, I beseech of you, no tea!" Signor Pini stayed her hand with a deprecatory gesture, and carefully seated himself in an attitude of distinguished deference. Everything about him drooped gracefully: eyelids, features, shoulders, coat-tails—especially knees. Only his waxed moustaches rose peaked, like two needles, erect. "A glass of Vermuth," he said mildly, "if it must be. You do not appreciate the Vermuth di Torino. Try it. It is not as good in this country as in mine. But then nothing is that!" He nodded his head sadly, and his eyelids sank over splendours of memory such as only an exile can see.

"Perhaps I could give my father a message?" suggested Dorothea, watching the Vermuth disappear.

"Ah, signorina, you are in a hurry. All young people are, yet they only have time. Not that I am old"—his sharp glance sought a mirror—"sorrow oldens; I was old at eighteen!"

Dorothea sat gazing at him, deeply touched.

"If there is anything I could do for you," she began with extreme timidity, "I am sure that my father would permit me. He is generosity itself." Her own ideas of charity were aunt Mary's, in merciful contradiction with every sane rule on the subject.

The Italian's steel eyes flashed. "Ah ché bel cuore di donna!" he exclaimed. "Ah ché generosa gioventù! Ah, signorina, when you are wise as your elders, you will not offer thus rashly assistance to those who need it!"

"Do not, pray, speak too well of me! I but do what I can!" She thought with disgust of the luxury she lived in—of the daily hotel menu, of her lovely new clothes. She had never before met with educated indigence. The beggars of Brodnyck were pauper-born.

"The Blessed Virgin herself could do no more," replied Signor Pini. "I would doubt even if she has always done as much, alas!—for this humblest among her adorers! Hush!"—he cast a glance over one shoulder with comic apprehension. "The Virgin, I forgot, is a woman; she is jealous. You, you have nothing to do with her! Ah, Santa Madre, I doubt not thou hast done thy best for thy servant! Most certainly the fault must have been mine!" He smiled humbly to Dorothea, whose thoughts at this moment unexpectedly reverted to aunt Mary.

"Still, I have always shown devotion to the Virgin!" argued the Italian. "The Vermuth is fairly good—and yet my life has been!—my life has been!" Signor Pini flung up both carefully gloved hands to heaven! Nowadays only poor men wear gloves. "Ah, shall I tell you? It will help fill the time till M. le Colonel returns. When I was your age, I too was happy, rich, fortunate, surrounded by admiring relations, *bel giovane*!—two years later I was beggared, old, broken, alone!"

"Is it possible!" cried the girl, her face a study in emotions.

"You—you have never heard of Bomba, thank God! I am of Naples. I was a student. I belonged to the famous association, formed by our professors, for the freeing of Italy! I was the life of it. We were discovered, arrested, most of us tortured to death. I fled with others to Malta. All the vast possessions of my father were sequestered, because he would not bid me return."

"Garibaldi!" cried Dorothea, her eyes kindling.

The Italian started to his feet and bared his head.

"Garibaldi," he said solemnly, "was God's reply."

At that moment Dorothea deemed him splendid.

Then he sank down on his chair: his eyes glazed over, and he mechanically poured himself out another glass of Vermuth.

"Like all Italians, I am temperate," he said. "We require no stimulants to warm our blood. Since that day I have been a beggar—a beggar that earns his bread. And the Holy Virgin has helped me—somewhat. I fear she has little power over the cards, unless one marks them. And, then, you see, she also has to assist the Bourbons. They are very pious: they pay the Jesuits. She cannot excuse herself. Well, my money has gone to build Bourbon palaces at Cannes."

"The Lord Jesus——" began Dorothea very softly.

"Ah yes," sighed Monsieur Pini.

"Has taught us to rejoice in our afflictions."

"Ahimé, my dear young lady, that is Protestant religion." Signor Pini sat up briskly. "It is exceedingly beautiful, but almost would I ask, have you ever had afflictions to rejoice in? Sincerely do I hope not. Rejoice, dear young lady, rejoice! The Vermuth is finished. The Colonel comes not."

"I much regret it"—Dorothea rose—"but I am grateful to any opportunity which has procured me the great honour of your acquaintance." Again her calm eyes kindled. "I have never before met with a man who had sacrificed his life for his country. Be sure that my father will help you if he can. It is a great honour for me, sir, who have never done anything, to shake the hand of a soldier of Garibaldi!"

A swift flush spread over Signor Pini's sallow cheeks. "O ché gran cuor di donna!" he said softly. "O ché nobile gioventù! No, mademoiselle, it is not money I desire from you: it is fortune, wealth enormous, that I bring to monsieur your father. Already I had resolved, but a moment ago, to withdraw from him the chance he despises, and to confer it on another, the young lord. But your beauty of face and of soul—oh, bell' anima in bel corpo! oh diamante incastonato—d'oro!—see, these have touched me: the wealth of Golconda shall be yours!"

Dorothea drew back slightly. "Then why doesn't he buy a pair of new gloves?" she thought.

"You are most generous," she began, with an uncomfortable smile, "you, who said you were not. Both in your youth and in your age——"

"Age!"—the Italian winced. "Ah, mademoiselle, you are cruel. Believe me, sorrow has caused me to look older than my years. Tell your father from me, that he shall have till to-morrow at midday the refusal of my offer—for his lovely daughter's sake." He waved his hat to the ground, in the most ceremonious of salutes. "And remember me in your dove-like prayers," he said.

"I will," answered Dorothea gently.

"For in that case the system is bound to succeed."

"The system?" repeated Dorothea, much mystified.

"Even though, really—God forgive me—it would succeed without. Even the Almighty cannot resist mathematics."

"I don't think I quite understand," said Dorothea. "However, it does not much matter. Good-bye."

The Italian, who had already retreated, amid more bows, turned back, in a sudden inspiration. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "it is you shall be the Patron Saint of the system! The Blessed Virgin—but no, you are no business of hers! You will play the numbers, without her! Your white hand at the tables will assure us success!"

"You mean at Monte Carlo?" said Dorothea, feeling her way. "But, signore, that is very wicked. I am certain my father would never countenance anything in connection with that iniquitous place!"

"Youth is positive," replied the Italian drily.

"You do not mean to say that you go there? Oh, signore, I beg of you, abandon your system." Her cheeks flushed with fervour—"I know I have no right to say this, but I have heard so much about it——"

"About what?" almost shrieked the Italian—"about my system? How much has your father told you? He could tell nothing. He tells lies."

"I mean about Monte Carlo, and its crimes, and its suicides. People constantly speak of it. And they say that systems are the worst of all."

"True, true," answered Pini, hugging his thoughts. "Give my message to the Colonel or not, as you will. You are happy, signorina. Life seems simple to the happy. Farewell," and he slid away softly to the door.

When the Colonel came in to dinner, Dorothea had a strange experience to recount.

"Pini?" said the Colonel. "Oh yes, Pini! These hotel soups are really beastly. Did he tell you about Italia farà da sè?"

"You know him then, father?"

"I have met him. And I know that he talks of two subjects, the sorrows of his youth and the sadness of his age."

"And his system."

"He has never spoken to me of that," replied the diplomatic Colonel. "Did he explain it to you?"

"No, I told him you thought gambling was very wicked."

"Really?"

"As of course you do. There can be no two opinions about gambling, father."

"Very good people, Dolly, never think there can be two

opinions about anything. I suppose gambling *is* wicked. Who was it said that all pleasant things are?"

"A person, father, who was in the habit of telling untruths."

"I am not sure of that. However, you will now be able to judge for yourself about the wickedness of Monte Carlo. I have an invitation for you, the immediate result of this afternoon's visit. I met Egon von Roden at Monaco. He told me he had made your acquaintance. Did you like him?"

"I think not. He was rude."

"Rude? You must have misunderstood him. That is the last thing likely in a German of Roden's position. His mother and sister are going across there to lunch with his uncle, and he asked me to bring you too."

"To Monaco, father?"

"To Monaco, or Monte Carlo; it's all the same," said the Colonel, suddenly sick of a farce he could no longer keep up. "Unless by 'Monte Carlo' you choose to mean only the gaming-rooms. Of course you needn't go near *them*."

Dorothea bent over her plate. "Perhaps *I* was rude," she said, almost to herself.

"Judging without knowledge of the facts, I should be inclined to accept the latter alternative," said the Colonel, with what was an irritable note in the voice of so good-natured a man.

"But I'd rather not go to Monte Carlo, father."

"As you like. Only allow me to remind you that you did not want to call to-day, yet greatly liked the people, all the same, when you met them. Everybody, in my company, can do exactly as he pleases, but it does seem a pity, Dolly, that the pleasure of one person should so often consist in the not pleasing others."

After that they finished their dinner in comparative silence, and the Colonel departed by the 8.30 train, to accompany Madame de Fleuryse to "Popotte."

Dorothea, glad of a quiet evening, after many days of gaiety, went up to her room, and sorted her letters. She did not like the sound of the first harsh words her father had ever spoken to her, and, with a sensitive spirit's eagerness for self-reproach, she considered herself entirely to blame for them. She was selfish and inexperienced. Full

of her new bright pleasures only, she had not properly considered what amusements of hers must be a nuisance to him. He always showed such a cheerful front, she had never paused to ask whether boredom might not hide behind a beaming face. He was so good, so noble-hearted : whatever he approved of could not honestly be wrong. In a sudden revulsion of feeling she saw all the littleness of her Puritan precisionism showing ugly next to his tolerant knowledge of the world. She had been quick to think unreasonable evil of Egon von Roden ; she had expressed censure of Pini, a hero and a martyr ! She felt humbled to the dust, and sought mild consolation in her letters.

"Christmas has come and gone," wrote aunt Mary. "I could not but be glad to see so many people happy. Mark Lester helped in everything and produced a most beautiful Christmas tree, though not, of course, as beautiful as yours." "What a Christmas !" wrote aunt Emma. "Your aunt Mary praised the tree to the Lesters ; I was delighted to hear her ! But all's for the best, we are told, here below, and must try to believe it. Uncle Antony is growing old."

Dorothea, laying down the sheets, reflected on Christmas at Brodryck. At the hotel here they had had a plum-pudding, and her father had given her a locket. On New Year's Eve they had had Italian singers at the hotel, and Santa Lucia, and her father had given her a pin.

"I wish you a happy New Year," wrote uncle Tony, "and a speedy return to Brodryck. I don't understand about your father at all. I imagine some people in this world are very different from what others think them."

"Yes, indeed," sighed Dorothea, though she had not the faintest idea to what uncle Tony alluded.

Last of all, she took up Mark Lester's letter and re-read it. It spoke of his father's fading health : Dorothea would not see this friend of her youth again. "I am constantly with him now," wrote Mark, "and his one delight is to speak of my future here. What can I do but rejoice with him at the picture of myself as pastor ? Oh, Dorothea, what fools of duty we Christians are ! You, too—do not tell me you are happy away from Brodryck, for I will not believe it. Whatever befalls us, let us always remember that ours was a happy childhood. That is much ; it is the most any mortal has a right to ask, and more than many get."

Dorothea took up her pen and replied :

"Don't be so glum, Mark." She tore up the sheet: you could not write that to a man whose father was dying. "I am happy, very happy," she wrote. "I fear I have always been happy—it sounds so selfish—but I never have had a chance of feeling otherwise. God has always been good to me: He will be good in the future. And to you also He will be good, Mark, for you serve Him more faithfully, if more unwillingly, than I." It was poor theology, perhaps, and worse philosophy, but the words sank like balm of Gilead on Mark Lester's frozen and burning heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

"LET us, then, have a big explanation!" said the Baroness Blanche de Fleuryse. She flung open wide, with a rush, the French window of her room on the second floor of the Hotel Cosmopolitain at Monte Carlo. The sunshine poured in, warm, like a noiseless torrent of liquid gold. Far out shimmered, with incessant quivering of diamonds, the Mediterranean Sea.

"I love explanations," said the Baroness, steadying with shapely hand the auriferous (but unrooted) mountains that glorified her Juno-like head. The laces of her sky-blue morning robe fell loose about her ample bosom. Her face wore its usual look of contentment with herself and the world, pleasantly diversified, for the nonce, by amused disapproval of Sandring.

"I love explanations," said the Baroness Blanche, sinking down on her couch in a fragrance of violets. "Like thunderstorms, they clear the air!"

The Colonel sighed good-humouredly. "And I, as you well know, abhor them," he answered. "They are not a bit like thunderstorms. More like a dust-cloud. When the whole thing is over, you are left in a fog. You abuse your acquaintance with my antipathies, dear Blanche."

"Tcheep! Tcheep!" said the Baroness—to her canary. This bird had been purchased a week or two ago by the Colonel, at her eager insistence, from a hawker, whose cages were scarce bigger than his wares. The canary now inhabited a roomy, gilded residence, but the Baroness considered him a nuisance, and her maid did not always give him food. He eyed his owner doubtfully, edging away.

"He don't respond," said the Colonel, with savage satisfaction. "The beast can already distinguish the tones of your voice, my dear Blanche."

She mastered her palpable vexation, and smiled at him. "The long and the short of it is this," she said coolly:

"your charming daughter bores you. Don't!" She lifted her loosely-sleeved arm as if to ward off his protests. "I know what you are going to say: you think her exceedingly sweet. Oh, you fully appreciate her admirable qualities: you—you are benefited by her artless companionship: it does you good: it does you quantities of good, and then you come here and vent on me the ill-humour her virtues have engendered in a singularly amiable man. You play, with distinction, the rôle of père noble, but, believe me, you are not equal to the strain." She blew a whiff of cigarette-smoke into the sparkle of the sunshine.

"I thought I was," replied the Colonel ruefully. He sank for a moment in reflective contemplation of his polished finger-nails. Then he remarked, with vigour: "Look here: she's charming. We get on admirably. There's not a word of truth in what you say."

"As for the money," continued Madame, angrily rapping the cage, for the bird had found sudden voice and now hindered her, "that, I understand, is definitely settled on her. To the money you must bid farewell."

"I don't care a d—— about the money!" cried Sandring, glad of an excuse for a shout of irritation. "I must have told you so fifty times, at least. It's you that's always harping on the money. I expected her to have it, and she hasn't, and there an end of the whole vulgar affair."

"That is admirable: it is very like you, Lewis," said Madame in a little voice. "And perhaps you are right. If you so greatly enjoy your daughter's company, if you enjoy (I suppose it is the only word?) this continuous duplicity, secrecy, running to and fro, and hiding for fear of discovery—well, of course, if you really like this sort of thing, then, from your point of view there is no more to be said."

"And from yours?" inquired the Colonel, not unanxiously.

"My dear Colonel, do you really desire to know?"

He began some eager protestations, but she stopped him.

"From mine?" She rose suddenly, big and splendid.

"From mine there is simply this, that I refuse to accept it. I have other conceptions of enjoyment, I! I refuse to endure any longer the shadow of a schoolmiss black across my path! Can I do this? No. May I go there? No. Mind what you say to that idiot, Lord Archie! Wear not that hat! Dorothea has one like it. Remember, *we* are going to the opera to-morrow——"

"See how you exaggerate! You do not want to go to the opera at Nice——"

"I did, to hear Patti."

"Patti has no longer any voice to speak of. Besides, Dorothea is not going again. She does not approve, I believe, of the ballet."

"She is quite right. I have always thought the rows of bald-heads in their stalls at the Paris opera an unedifying sight. Well, she will go no more to the opera? Instead of that, she comes here!"

"Behold the explanation!" exclaimed the Colonel triumphantly. "Because, once in a way, after four weeks at Nice, Dorothea comes to see Monte Carlo with the Rodens, you get up all this scene. You misjudge my patience, Blanche."

She watched him for half a minute, quietly. Then she said: "These continued unpleasantnesses are beyond me. We had better part."

The Colonel also waited a few seconds before replying. Madame's heart went mildly pit-a-pat: she half-closed her eyes.

"Nonsense!" said the Colonel, and at the first sound of his voice she opened her eyes again and smiled. "Don't be a fool, Blanche. What do you want me to do?"

"Lewis, we must get rid of your daughter. Send her back to her aunts."

"No, by thunder!" thundered the Colonel, sitting up from his dawdle on the sofa. "Have her out for the money and send her back, when she hasn't got it? Make a howling cad of myself—and before those two psalm-singing aunts of hers? No!"

"You needn't scream," replied the lady. "Your animus shows how regretfully you have abandoned the idea. Well, I admit there are difficulties. The other alternative remains."

"What other alternative?"

"Marry her to somebody. The sooner the better."

"You speak as if husbands were to be got at the street-corners."

"Well, so they are by girls who, like your daughter, can put four thousand a year into the slot. But, of course, we are desirous to get a good one. Even that is quite possible."

"You talk. You talk."

"I know of one, for instance."

"Who?"

"Pini."

"The joke is a bad one," said the Colonel.

"And why, pray, should Signor Pini not be a suitable husband for your daughter? You tell me yourself that she greatly admires him. He will soon be exceedingly wealthy——"

"He is older than I am!"

"Hardly. Nor are you so very old. As for that, when a young girl admires a man with admiration, the older he is the more she feels she may admire him."

"Pini! You are insulting, Blanche."

"Insulting? He is a Count."

"So are we all, Baroness!"

"N—no. His is a *bond fide* title, which he had the good taste to drop—or, rather, it was taken from him; but the new Italian Government would of course restore it at once. Count Pini Pizzatelli is worthy of any alliance in Europe."

"Well, if the title be genuine, the wealth is at least problematical. I admit the accuracy of Pini's little 'system,' but it doesn't go far. It means, at the outside, a couple of napoleons a day."

The Baroness Blanche drew a chair beside the Colonel's sofa. "Ah, that is the inverted martingale," she said; "but the time has come to tell you the truth. This is child's play. We only showed it you to give you confidence. Pini has two systems: the other is the real one. It requires a large capital. Big risks, big returns. He has told me nothing about it, excepting that it covers all the numbers each time."

"Including the zero?" smiled the Colonel.

"Evidently."

"But that is mathematically impossible!"

"Nothing is impossible."

"Not even in mathematics?"

"Heavens, do you take me for a school-teacher? In England, perhaps. Yours is a nation of accountants, but in France it is always the impossible that happens."

"Monte Carlo is not even in France."

"Mathematically—to use your expression—it is. Besides, where a Frenchwoman is, there France is. When a man talks what he calls common-sense to a woman, he is always insupportable. Pini is sure of his secret. He is ready to give any man practical proof."

"Any man?"

"I should have said no man but one—the man who can provide him with the necessary capital. Even to him he will not confide his secret. He will only pay him a hundred per cent.!" She began to pace up and down the room. "Pooh!" she said, "in six months' time he can marry a princess!"

"My daughter'd never as much as look at a Roman Catholic!"

"Oh yes, she would, if she liked him. I have seen many things in my life; I have never yet seen a suitable marriage abandoned by a Protestant on account of religious divergence. The Jesuits know that! Oh, they know it! Look at their work in the Almanach de Gotha!"

"I have never made a study of the Almanach de Gotha. I believe you have learnt it by heart."

She laughed. "Well, you see, I am a Baroness and you are a commoner," she answered. "It is immensely interesting, the Almanach de Gotha; you can read the most wonderful romances between the lines. But to return to the romance we are constructing. You marry this Dolly of yours, who loves patriots and martyrs, and even, probably, counts, to her most romantic Italian. He takes you into partnership, and, see, in one month we are bathing in money and—frankly—rid of the girl!"

"Modify your expressions," retorted the Colonel angrily. But he was more than half fascinated by the prospect held out to him. After all, the impossible "system" remains an ever possible dream.

"Well, I have frankly said my say about your daughter. I love frankness. Nor, to-day, do not think I shall stay away from the rooms."

"Blanche, I must insist—Dorothea will never come a second time——"

"Rubbish. Of course you have amiably told her to ignore me should we meet—just as you have a dozen times, very superfluously, requested me to avoid her."

"I have never mentioned the subject," said the Colonel uncomfortably.

"Why not?"

"I don't know. False shame, I suppose."

Her face grew purple. She walked hastily to the window. "Go," she said in a smothered voice. "Go to this luncheon of Count Roden's; it is time."

"Why, no, I've still got half an hour——"

She stamped her foot. "It is time you went," she said. "Go!"

The Colonel, with a hot smile on his face, did as he was bid. How right he had been about the effect of explanations.

"Tcheep! Tcheep!" said the lady to the rapidly retreating canary. She tore her small handkerchief across in the clenching of her nervous hands.

Meanwhile, the innocent subject of all this discussion was seated on the terrace of the "Continental," enjoying the loveliest sight she had ever beheld in her life. She had thought until now that nothing could be more beautiful, or, at least, more enchanting, than the Baie des Anges, but she found she was mistaken. The panorama before and around her seemed a vision of a pagan Paradise.

Her rapt admiration began to lie heavy on Lord Archie. "You ought to come and see it at night," he remarked. "Some Carnival night, say, next month."

"I suppose it is beautifully illuminated," she answered with perfunctory interest.

Lord Archibald stared; a grin broke and died on his face. "Well, perhaps you're as well away," he said, "it's apt to get common of nights."

Dorothea glanced round at the little company. Lady Archibald was certainly "common;" everybody else was the other extreme.

Old Count Roden had insisted on inviting his well-married compatriot. "You will put her close to me, Egon," he said. "She has neither humour nor wit, nor much sense, but to me she is immensely diverting. It is the novelty. I am an old man in search of new sensations. Nothing new under the sun? How can stupid people say so? Now, this sort of social development is as absolutely new as a— as a motor car. It will be amusing to watch her with your admirable mother. Had she married a German, one would of course have avoided her as the pestilence, but now she is quite sans conséquence."

"As you wish, uncle Karl."

The old gentleman went off into a succession of chuckles. He was a jolly old gentleman, important and respected. His whole life had been a continuous naughtiness, of the sort which the world approves. "I shall also ask the

Countesses Kauenfels. I forbid you to enlighten them. 'My dear Countess Bathildis, this is Lady Archibald Foye—the Foyes, you know, the Marquis of Brassingham'—then I shall leave them to discover her. It will take a little time. Finally she will speak to them in the South German dialect and tell them—she always does—that she was a Biermädel. I hope to be present." He gravely drew his long white fingers down his whiter moustache. Taller by a couple of inches than any of the other Rodens (whose lowest mark was five feet eleven), his slender figure encased in clothes that might be a young man's marvel, he knew himself to stand out, with his healthy cheeks and silvery hair, a superb example of his kind. During all his life he had cared for himself with constant and tender care. That life had been largely spent in courts, and his outer graces were those of the courtly Emperor's time. The Rodens knew that he could at times be both coarsely insulting and cheaply kind.

He stopped chuckling. "Why don't Konrad go back to his regiment?" he demanded sharply. "When is his leave up? Your family's too numerous, Egon. We're too large a party for a lunch." He did not wait for an answer. In grey checks, a white waistcoat and a dark red buttonhole, he sat in the hotel verandah. His nephew stood before him, almost in the attitude of an orderly.

"Well, it can't be helped," continued the Count. "Nobody could sit down to a meal alone with half-a-dozen relations. Why don't your father come?"

"I'm afraid he is not well enough," said Egon.

"Well, that's one less. But I'm sorry for Justus. Look here, Egon, I suppose that Konrad plays. I won't have any playing, do you hear?"

"I don't think he plays," replied Egon. "He amuses himself up to a small limit. When he has lost that, he tells me he'll stop."

"Well, that is really the only reasonable 'system'; it's my own. I presume with a wider limit; nobody could call it play. That's what I like in Konrad. There's a certain sneaking, cautious, count-the-cost sort of way about his amusements, every bit like what I was at his age. Now you, Egon"—he turned triumphantly to this elder nephew—"if you weren't so good, what a fool you'd be! Once you began to plunge, you'd go over, like a horse on a cliff; you'd not have the wit to stop yourself. You're like your

father, who always expended a shilling's worth of energy on a pennyworth of fun. Not that your father ever plunged. And now look at your father—he's done for. While I!" He struck his manly chest.

Egon turned red. "My father is feeling much better," he said.

"Of course. They always do. Poor Justus, does he still repeat: Life is glorious? Pooh, you can know the whole man by that one stock sentence. Life isn't glorious a bit, but it is profoundly interesting. Don't you throw away your chances, Egon, as your father did."

"You have said that to me before, uncle. I—I wish you wouldn't put it like that. But, as to my chances, I don't see that I have any." His glance sank to his maimed foot.

"*That* is an extra attraction," said the old man, whose quick eyes nothing escaped. "Most especially in a young Apollo like you. Remember Byron. The woman are so made, poor things. Unlike us, they are wholly selfish or wholly devoted. Yes, Egon, you must marry money, and your limp will be a help. It will keep off the bad ones." He took his nephew's arm. "Come, let us walk down to the station to meet these people," he said. "Why—do you know—even I have a weakness for you, on account of your infirmity. I wish I could be certain that the property would ultimately come to *you* when I'm gone."

"Why, uncle, you always tell me you like Konrad better!"

"So I do; he is more my sort. All the same, I have a weakness for you. How about this English girl your mother was so anxious to bring with her. Is she pretty?"

"I believe so," replied Egon.

"Believe? But you've seen her."

"Yes, I've seen her. However, tastes differ, dear uncle, and you are such a connoisseur."

"Egon, you have some of your father's most exasperating tricks. Now, Konrad would have given me a racy little picture of the 'Engländerin,' dishing her up like a menu."

"She is Dutch, uncle. I must say I hate the way Konrad can describe a woman's composition, as if she were a bowl of punch!"

The luncheon was shrill with laughter, and therefore presumably gay. A good deal of noise always rose around Lord and Lady Archie. Their whole life was a loud laugh, with little behind it. For the last few weeks Archibald,

industriously working a new vein of mercury (but some called it lead), had devoted his talents to teaching his consort a tangle of topsy-turvy slang. Lady Archibald clearly appreciated the connection—in manners and language—between idioms and ease, and she liked to show, by her lightness and brightness, that she wasn't afraid of old frumps.

"Your trotters can take you to Beaulieu in an hour," she had said to the Duchess of Birmingham, who was gouty, and half lame and deaf. Lady Archibald had to yell the words twice in the presence of half-a-dozen tea-drinkers. "It's your own fault," protested Archie, when he'd got her outside. "I told you that horses were 'gees.'" "She's?" exclaimed the German indignantly. "Told me have you *not*, and, if so, it were nothing to the matter. Also I am not such a stupid as not to know that horses have two sexes. It is donkeys that are masculines alone." In the midst of this quarrel it transpired that she had told old Sir Jeremy Bumblethorpe to varnish his trotter-cases once every season, if he wanted them to look smart. Elated by such unexpected success, her artless and artful husband began to lay elaborate plots. He informed her that "haricots verts" were the favourite dish of the Bishop of Boring, and then, in her presence, invited that prelate to lunch. "Oh, do come, and I will give you beans," said the charming Lady Archie, and Archibald was happy for a week. Does any one want to hear any more of Archie's exploits? How he succeeded in causing "the Biermädel" to call Captain Vane, U.S.N., in his own boat, before his own men, at the top of her voice, a "cocky swain"; how he got her to ask the famous flower-grower, Prescott, whether it was true that his newly produced specimen of Arbutilon was "all rot"; how—stop; they who do not already love Archie will never learn to love him. Besides, are his deeds not inscribed in his book, still unpublished, of original humour? His greatest accomplishment was making a sudden screech with his lips, exactly like the tearing of a skirt. He tried this with eminent success on the Countess Bathildis, poor half-blind old body, who fumbled about, all the long afternoon, to find out the rent.

"I say," whispered Archie to Egon, as the guests took their places: "She's just said 'go along!' to that old Mother Hubbard with the toothache. She believes that it's English for 'after you!'" The "toothache" was a

more or less appropriate allusion to the broad bands of the old Countess's black straw hat. Yet Archibald, though he laughed at everybody, including himself, was fond of old women. His care for his mother had been proverbial in the family. The poor Marchioness wept many bitter tears at the loss of this son who, as a small boy, had put cobbler's wax on her chair, and then plumped down on his knees, with streaming cheeks, when she could not rise from it.

"Oh, Lord, help mother to get up again!" he had roared. "Oh, Lord, help mother to get up again!" That the wax did not melt immediately had been a great shock, all through life, to Lord Archibald.

The two old Countesses von Kauenfels were queer, good-natured, dumpy old creatures in grey alpaca. There was a softness about their features which bespoke long ages of inherited refinement, and the shape of their hands alone was a brevet of pre-revolution nobility. The people whose ancestors came into existence after '89 must always remain distinguishable from the people whose ancestors died before.

The two Countesses behaved charmingly to "the young English Miladi," in their pretty old-fashioned shyness. Doubtless they had many friends in common? After these they began amiably to inquire. Lady Archibald, who, of course, had never heard of the people, answered demurely, with a great affectation of propriety, and assured them that every one was in excellent health. Suddenly, however, tiring of her rôle, she declared that Lady Butterton was dead.

"Dead!" exclaimed Bathildis in grief and amazement. "Frederica, listen; can it be possible? Maria Butterton dead! And we heard from her only last month!"

"Oh, well, if it isn't Maria, it's somebody else," said Lady Archibald, and she turned round to Konrad, with whom she took up a long-standing flirtation in her own broad South German *patois*. "What—what—what is this?" gasped the Countess Bathildis to her host.

"Did you not know," asked the latter with a smile, "that Lord Archibald had married a German?"

The Countess Bathildis looked from the wife to the husband and back again twice—three glances in all, containing a three-volume novel. Then she resolutely faced Colonel Sandring, who began to talk at once of the tables.

"I never go near them," said Bathildis. "We have a house here. The only possible way to live at Monte Carlo is not to know that the tables exist." She took no further notice of "that terrible person," who greatly enjoyed an impression thus easily made.

"Is that your daughter?" inquired the old lady of Colonel Sandring, as Dorothea's laugh rose up clear at some silly sally of Archie's. She smiled towards the other end of the table and nodded benevolently. "I like to hear young people laugh," she said. "Have you ever noticed, there is nothing in all the word you can so unerringly judge refinement by as a laugh?" Lady Archibald sat shrieking with Konrad.

"Diese entsetzliche Person!" muttered the Countess Bathildis repeatedly to herself as the company rose from table, and she twisted about in search of the tear in her gown and her tortoise-shell glasses. The latter Lady Archibald found for her and presented with an adorably impertinent little curtsy.

"Ah, you did not know we were compatriots?" said the "person." "But yes, before I married my Archie I was 'Biermädel' at the 'Grosser Kurfürst' in Kissingen! I have often seen your brother there, 'das Fränzchen'; he squints. Often have I said to him: 'Why do you come here? You will never get better by the water as long as you drink so much beer!'"

The old Countess glared.

"Tell him so from me, once again, when you write!" cried the blue-eyed tormentress, and ran away laughing after Konrad.

Bathildis turned, breathless, to right and left. She struck her black cane on the floor and said audibly: "Ich bitte—a gentleman!" She held out her hand to Egon. "Conduct me to my carriage!" she said.

But he mildly led her across to the verandah, to have some coffee. "What, Bathildis? Not running away?" cried the Count.

The challenge, intentional or not, roused the tiger that sleeps in every blue-blooded old woman. "Indeed, I am not running away," she retorted. "Come, Egon, sit beside me, a little away from the noise. I am old. What does your mother make of this 'person'?"

"Oh, well—I heard mother saying how pretty she was."

"Oh! That, we know, with your family, excuses every-

thing. Of course she is pretty, in her way. All the peasants about Kauenfels are pretty like that."

Egon thought that the lonely old castle in Württemberg must be quite a desirable place of abode.

"I might have seen what sort of a creature she was by just her sort of prettiness. We weren't pretty. My father used often to tell us that we were the only plain girls about the place. 'You aren't like the peasants,' my dear father used to say."

"But, Comtesse——" protested the unfortunate young man.

"What?" She twinkled her blind old eyes at him. "Well, what are you trying to say? Do not make yourself foolish, my child. Do you think an old woman like me seeks for compliments? I remember hearing your father say once, when your age, that all ugly women ought to be drowned. That is what you Rodens think. It served me right. I was listening behind the door."

With a shock Egon Roden realised that this must be the wealthy cousin his father had refused to marry. His eyes strayed to his mother's delicate face, like a porcelain flower, and back to the rugged old lady. Here was a woman's whole tragedy in a word.

"I have never listened behind doors again," said Bathildis thoughtfully.

"My father has always enjoyed saying sharp things and thinking soft ones," stammered Egon, hot and flurried. "You know very well that he didn't mean you."

"You think not? Now, how kind of you to say so! And for thirty years I have fancied he did!" She laughed heartily, with her hand on his forearm. "Put my coffee on the table," she added. "The other side, opposite Lady Archibald! Thanks." •

She sat down at the table and leisurely stirred the liquid, until there befell a moment of universal silence, and then—

"Yes, my dear Lady Archibald Foye," she said in pellucid accents—and speaking the husband's language. "I shall certainly give my brother your very kind message. You must not feel hurt if he does not remember you. It is of course much more natural that you should remember him."

Lady Archibald reddened slightly. "He need not remember of me," she said. "What he must do to remember is to drink less beer."

"Doubtless he does drink less, since you are no longer there to tempt him. Yes, certainly, he has little foibles, my brother: I do not deny it." She sighed and assumed that little air of confusion with which righteous females salute, in conversation, the approach of the unapproachable. "And bigger ones, too, alas! Lord Archibald, your charming lady informs me that she knows my brother well. She knew him, it appears, before you were engaged to her, when she was—otherwise engaged."

She turned to Count von Roden and, still persistently speaking English, "Yes, my brother is still unmarried," she said. "I fear he is not of the sort of men that marry. He likes to enjoy himself, poor Franz!" Then for ten minutes longer she talked in her native language to Madame de Roden of the decadence of society and the breaking-down of barriers, after which she departed, carrying with her her ever acquiescent sister. "Farewell," she said, "my good Lady Archibald; I shall certainly give my brother your message. How strange that you should have known him so well!"

CHAPTER IX.

DOROTHEA paused on the steps of the Casino. "It looks even more beautiful, if possible," she said, "than it did an hour ago."

"That's the luncheon," replied Archie morosely, "a good luncheon always makes me feel like that. Yes, it was a beautiful luncheon."

"Come into the rooms," interjected Egon. "The sight will amuse you for half an hour."

Play was of course in progress at all the tables over all the crowded place. The vista of halls hung heavy with gilding, and clouded light, and stuffy air. Heaviness, that was the all-pervading atmosphere, and under it a breathless concentration of intensest human thought. The far aisle, pillared and painted in gorgeous ornamentation, recalled some dim Southern basilica—such, for instance, as Santa Maria Maggiore—a desecrated temple, and yet not desecrated truly, a palace of most certain devotion, religiously up-built by earnest-hearted votaries, spontaneously made brilliant with the symbolism and carefully adapted to the service of the God. The Exchange and the Bourse are too noisy. They present an insidious pretension of work. There hangs about them a false glamour of honest earnings. Monte Carlo is very different from these. Here is held the high service of Mammon in its purely religious aspect, untrammelled by all considerations of labour, a sort of inverted Litany, a Messe Noire, the adoration, the supplication of the deity—We beseech thee to hear us, our God! About all forms of sincere devotion, however fantastic, a certain impressiveness slowly fastens, and to the sympathetic student of his kind there is something grotesquely sacred in the scene at the gambling rooms. For here, in its hideous enticing nakedness, stands revealed to the eyes of the scorner, the weeper and the slave, that cult which is stronger than all other mortal religions, philosophies, fine aspirations, stronger than honour and fear and all passing

affections—ay, seemingly stronger than God in His empty cathedrals—the abandonment, body and soul, to the Lord of the Ages, the thirst of the whole human heart towards gold. To describe that still fervour of worship were idle : he who has once observed it can never forget.

A glance round the gaudy and sordid assembly swept clouds of uncertainty from Dorothea's inexperienced brain. All the queer people of Nice were here. These, then, were the gamblers. Suddenly it seemed to her as if she had always understood. The class that cannot earn money, but can only inherit or steal it : the up-to-date "upper class" of Europe, its promiscuous "society," the scum at the top.

Le demi-monde, on the lips of Dumas, meant the fringe of the great one. Conditions have changed, and, with the disappearance of the contrast, we no longer understand, but can only misapply, the term. There is no great world now. There is only, above the quiet, constant aristocracies of hearth and home and mart and village, the noisy crowd of blackguards that are rich.

Dorothea, with Egon behind her, stopped near a crowded table, full of the usual murmur, jingle and stress. People were putting down their money : the twang of the croupiers broke through the general buzz.

"That woman opposite," whispered the young man at the novice's shoulder, "they call 'Baroness,' but she isn't. The one seated in front of her they call 'Your Royal Highness,' and she is!"

Dorothea's glance followed his guidance. A suppressed cry of surprise touched her lips.

"Somebody you know?"

"Oh, she's playing!" said Dorothea. "No, nobody I know—exactly." She could not but remember Madame de Barvielle in kindness. Dorothea was not of those who forget small services. She wondered what had become of the little text-book. For a moment she stood watching the lady, who was busy pricking her card.

"Faites votre jeu, messieurs ! faites votre jeu !"

The Colonel crept up behind her, apparently cool. "There's an old Russian princess winning heaps in the other room," he suggested ; "come and look."

She flashed her bright eyes around immediately. "Yes, I'm coming," she said. "Look, father, there's the lady who lent me the money in the train : I should just like to ask if the post-office order ever reached her——"

"D——!" answered the Colonel, full into her eyes. She fell back, as if he had flung out his fist. He was a man of few oaths: he had muttered an occasional mild imprecation in her presence: he had never thus fiercely cast an oath into her face. In a second he had entirely recovered himself. "Nobody can speak in this place to people they don't know," he said curtly. "Dear girl, do let well alone."

His daughter shrank away out of sight, behind a burly Frenchman: in doing so she saw the lady opposite look up from her card towards the Colonel, saw a swift flash of recognition lighten across from one to the other, understood, in that tenth of a second, that a certain degree of intimacy existed between her father and this Baroness of the roulette, her companion of the train. A dozen arranged meetings in public would not have argued, to a woman, such a close degree of intercourse as lay in that one leap of the eye.

She stepped hastily forward, seeking to escape from the crush: her vexed glances flew rapidly to and fro. Somebody moved aside with a rustle, thinking she wanted to stake. For one instant she stood fully revealed before a dingy background of broadcloth, in her tailor-made shaggy-white costume: Madame, raking gold to a number, half-turned in the direction of the sudden bright spot. Their eyes met. Madame's look was quite stony.

"Rien ne va plus!" The little ball clashed into its hole. "Please, please—let us go away!" the girl said softly to Egon. "Yes, come: I will show you the Trente et Quarante."

Colonel Sandring stood watching his daughter's departing figure. How well she looked in that frock, like a calla lily! What unnecessary complications women made!

With a rather heightened colour he sauntered across the middle room, vaguely pondering on possible solutions. And there—really, it seemed almost an indication from Providence—stood Pini.

He pulled the Italian by the sleeve. "I say, come and have tea with us outside," he said.

"Go to the devil!" replied Pini, without turning.

"By Jove, have you gone mad?" cried the exasperated Colonel.

"There! You've broken my run of luck!" Signor Pini flew round.

"I am truly sorry," said Sandring, with a colleague's—and now even a collaborator's—intelligent sympathy. "Only, I wanted to make you better acquainted with my daughter. The story of your sufferings has greatly impressed her."

"I have not troubled the young lady with the story of my sufferings," replied Pini proudly, "but she has an angel's swiftness towards all that is good."

"She's romantic, you know, like what nice girls are. She doesn't seem favourably impressed by this place. You will make a delightful diversion with 'Italia farà da se.' Begad, she believes you're a hero."

"So I was, once," replied the Italian, in a voice from the tomb. "It does not become a brave man to mock at bravery."

They were out in the light and spacious entrance-hall, with its ceaseless to and fro. In the middle of all the hurry the Colonel held out his hand.

"You are right," he said.

"I bravi s'abbracciano," responded the Italian. For one awful instant Sandring thought this was going to happen. He shook in his shoes.

Meanwhile Egon and Dorothea had passed into the innermost room. At the selectest of the Trente et Quarante tables they found Lady Archibald, with Konrad very docile beside her, dropping tiny napoleons on to the vast green cloth. "I am doing a piety," said the lady, "pray have the goodness not to look disapproval." Dorothea endeavoured to regard her with admiration, but only succeeded in marking surprise.

"It is—a—what do you call it?—some sort of animal!" yawned Lady Archie, "but, you see, I am doing of my duty, so Herr Konrad says I ought to feel glad."

"Are you punting for Archie?" inquired Egon.

"Ah no! but I promised Archie's bishop to play a whole hour for his 'Rookeries.' I know not what are Rookeries, do you? It is something of religion. Archie says it has to do with the birds—jailbirds—and beaks, but that of course is his nonsense. I never believe Archie no more."

"Well, I hope you are winning?" said Dorothea, much amused.

"Indeed, yes. Put another louis on couleur, Herr Konrad. But it would not be a grief, if I lost, for the louis are Herr Konrad's."

"Please, let us go out!" said Dorothea, and once more her obedient companion willingly followed her. She naturally avoided, on her way to the entrance, the corner in which she had encountered Madame de Barvielle. She was quite close to the table on the further side before she noticed that the lady had moved to it. She halted, just a hitch, and was passing on——

"Come round here—there is less of a crush!" said Egon quickly but awkwardly. He flung himself between her and the touch of the other's skirt.

She walked on without a word, ahead of him. Out of the stiffling and rattle of the rooms, out of the whirl and the patter of the vestibule, round to the great deserted terrace, to the silence of sun-lit immensity, the splendour, the glitter and greenery: radiant heaven high above, radiant sea deep below, radiant flowers all round.

She advanced to the balustrade and stood looking out on the water. She drew a long breath and tried not to think of that woman, her father's acquaintance, whom von Roden had not wanted her to touch. But the recollection rolled down heavy on her heart of the night in the train, of the evening in Paris, the meeting at the Grand Hotel.

A shot rang out exactly under her feet. Dorothea saw the bird flutter struggling across the greensward, saw the dog run out and seize it in his mouth, saw the trap door shut down.

"Oh, the pigeon-shooting!" she said. "What brutes men are!"

Egon Roden pulled at his moustache. "Well, I grant you it's an ugly sight, though scores of women like it. Sport, you know!"

"Sport?" she turned. "Call it poulterer's work."

"Oh, now you're too hard. However, I admit it: we are cruel."

"Yes," she said musingly. "Still, I have heard that the poor are cruel from indifference or ignorance, rarely for fun." The shot rang out again: she fairly fled up the terrace.

Egon von Roden came limping after her. She was standing by a mass of Japanese medlars, in a great cloud of perfume. Her cheeks were aglow. "Please do not laugh at me!" she pleaded. "You see, I have never before been away from my village, except for a trip up the Rhine or to Switzerland, where the people seemed good as at

home. "I have never been in places like this. The dark places of the earth are full of wickedness, says the Bible, and of course one knows it must be so; but here all the wickedness is out in the sunlight, for every one to see and admire! You must think me half crazy"—the tears were in her eyes—"you that have been everywhere and seen everything, but I don't care; I can't help it. Oh, take me away from this horrible place!"

"Let us walk round to the restaurants," he said gently; "your father will be expecting us. I haven't been everywhere and seen everything—by no means. We are quite simple folk. Please feel at home with all of us."

She made a violent effort to calm herself. "I do," she said with great simplicity. "You are like my own people—at Brodryck."

"We have always lived together quite quietly at home, with my father and mother to look after us," he continued, smiling. "You cannot think what a splendid thing it is to have had such a father as mine!"

"I think I can," she answered, with slow weighing of the words. The Colonel and Signor Pini were signalling to them from a little table. The Colonel was always punctual, but never impatient, he said.

"Herr von Roden," said the Colonel, "let me make you acquainted with Count Pini Pizzatelli. Dorothea, you have met the signore."

The Italian stood bowing to the dust: "Mademoiselle," he said, "your gallant father was telling me you deign to love us a little, us Italians."

"Oh, yes!" replied Dorothea, "but I never met an Italian before." She did not see why her father need laugh so immoderately. "Italy is an idea," she continued confusedly, "it means everything to all of us! All civilised nations love Italy!"

"Bravo, you are improving. You got out of that rather neatly!" cried the Colonel. Egon scowled at Colonel Sandring.

"Ah, you were not a danger in my country!" declared the Italian. "All things beautiful—true—are at home on that soil." Egon scowled at Count Pini.

"Doubtless, some day you will behold it. In a month I shall be in a condition to return—ah, and how!—to my fatherland. Then you and your father will visit me at Naples. Naples! Hush: listen! To drive you, with our

swift little horses, along Posilippo to Baiae; suddenly we turn the corner where Nicida sleeps, far out in its bay! Then, slow, slow, along the water, seeing Paradise reflected in the rapture of two beautiful eyes!" In his own gaze lay, awakened, the dreams of his boyhood. Dully they sank back into their grave. "And the fools who have never seen Naples," he murmured, "tell us that Paradise is lost."

"Surely it cannot be finer than this?" remarked Egon, offering Dorothea biscuits, sugar, whatever stood near him.

But Pini took no notice of the German; his eyes were fixed on Miss Sandring. "My dear young lady," he said, "perhaps I have forgotten. Or perhaps I remember too well."

"Oh, what must it have cost you to leave it!"

"My life," replied the Italian. "The life I have lived. Death, the life one lays down—ah, that is a little sacrifice."

Egon shoved the biscuits across to him. "Did you ever meet Garibaldi?" asked Egon.

Signor Pini lifted his wide-awake. "In the moment of victory," he said, "I have kissed Garibaldi."

The Colonel shivered in the warm air. "Why, I never knew you had actually borne arms!" he cried in a burst of genuine cordiality. "Bravo, you are one of Garibaldi's veterans! We were comrades, then, before I knew of it, soldiers of fortune, you and I!"

"Let me finish," concluded Pini, "I have kissed Garibaldi, in effigy, every time that I heard of some new feat of arms. I, in my garret at Paris, where his picture graced the unpapered wall. But I never was privileged to look on his face. What will you have? I was ever of the luckless. But the wheel turns at last."

"That's right," said Egon heartily.

"In my country, for instance," continued Pini, "all learn all the languages. See here: nobody wants to learn Italian!" The Colonel tried to wink at somebody, but Dorothea was gazing at Pini, and Egon was gazing at Dorothea.

"Behold now, this miserable Riviera, a hotbed of crime! At Ospidaletti, just over yonder, a company would build a casino: what said Italy? It means millions. It means dishonour. I am poor. I am honourable. No!"

"Well, that's true," admitted the Colonel. His daughter's lips parted in astonishment over the happy inventor of the system.

"Behold, then, the absurd administration!" continued the enthusiastic exile. "The port! The railways! The police! The army! Here, what corruption, what incapacity! In Italy, what excellence, in all!"

The Colonel, unable to contain himself, winked at a small dog, come for a biscuit. The dog at least winked back.

"In Sicily—ah, povera Sicilia!—bull-fights were to be organised for visitors, a whole industry, a new source of prosperity. What answered Umberto?" He rose and rolled forth the words: "*Piuttosto perdere il trono che di vedere un tale barbarismo sul suolo italiano!*"

The Colonel rose also, not discontent with his daughter's flushed delight. "Praise Umberto as much as you like," he said, "few people will disagree with you there. But, dear me, Italian is terribly sonorous in the open air! Come, Dolly, we must be off to the station."

Signor Pini accompanied them down the descent. "But France?" he said, "she is the cocotte among the nations. She has all the vices and the virtues of the cocotte."

"What is a cocotte?" queried Dorothea.

"A woman who is both lovely and not too good," interposed the Colonel hastily. "Well, Pini, that is a delightful combination. Come to lunch some day. Good-bye."

"Could anything be more pleasing," said the bending Italian, "than to escape for an hour from this palace of the devil and repose, learning virtue, at the feet of an angel?" Both the Colonel and Dorothea felt unable to master this conundrum, but Egon responded, rather fervently, that, no indeed, nothing could.

Dorothea was loud in her praises of Pini's idealism, enthusiasm, self-sacrifice. Her two companions listened, amused. Decidedly, thought the Colonel, Blanche was even cleverer than he knew—her very imbecilities, he said, are cleverness disguised.

In the crush of the corridor train Dorothea was carried away from the rest of the party. Unable to find a seat, she was pushing leisurely up the gangway, when Lord Archibald's shrill accents arrested her. Lord Archibald, thanks to the old Countess Bathildis, had gone on the fret. Post-marital flirtations, he always averred, left him "unaffectedly unaffected," but thoughts of the Biermädels possible antecedents gave him the shivers down the small of his back. To punish her, he had first invited Konrad to dinner and then carried him off alone to the "London

House" at Nice. It was Archie's voice that now escaped from a smoking compartment.

"That's a nice girl—a very decent girl indeed. But the Colonel should take her to Cannes. Cannes is the place for her sort. Especially with that woman about."

"What woman?" queried Konrad, and Dorothea's heart stood still for an answer.

"Why! Blanche de Fleuryse."

Dorothea's heart gave a leap of relief. But the next moment she wondered why it had done so. She was certain of nothing, excepting an atmosphere of allusion and her own vague discontent.

She opened the door of her bedroom at last with a sense of exhaustion, but lo and behold, in the middle of the floor stood, ready for battle, Rebecca.

"Freule," said Rebecca, "I want to go home to Holland to-night."

"That," replied Dorothea, "I regret to say, is beyond mortal power. But of course you could start."

"The vessels of the abomination of Babylon are full," said the handmaid, sternly rubbing her nose.

Dorothea paused in the action of drawing the pin from her hat. "Somehow your texts sound so curiously unconvincing," she made answer. "Could you give me chapter and verse for that one?"

"The letter killeth," retorted Rebecca promptly, "but the spirit—spirit——"

"Well?" said Dorothea provokingly.

"Doesn't," concluded the spinster, undeniably put out.

Dorothea laughed; then her eyes filled with sudden gravity, as she fixed them on the maid. "The spirit maketh alive," she said thoughtfully, "maketh alive."

"Well, at any rate, I'm going home," barked Rebecca.

"You leave me alone then—in Babylon?" suggested Dorothea, continuing her toilet.

Rebecca stood by the door and crooked her long forefinger. "Come out of her!" she said.

"There's nothing behind you but the passage," replied Dorothea impatiently. "Do help me dress. Or no, go away, please, and worry some one else that's not worried already. Of course I will send you back if you wish it. You're the only person I can talk to of the aunts, and the village, and the dogs, and everything, but that's neither here nor there. I must stay with my father.

The Dutchwoman folded her arms across her breast: for the first time a look of sympathy came into her colourless eyes. "Must you?" she said, with that horrible rasp of hers. "Poor lamb! no, you mustn't. Come home."

"Give me the foulard with the flowers," answered Dorothea.

With a grumph Rebecca produced from a wardrobe a flimsy white dinner-gown covered with irises. She held it out scornfully at arm's length.

"It's a mercy Miss Mary can't see you in that frock!" said Rebecca, "it'd break her gentle heart. I thought, for the abomination of wickedness, Brodryck'd have satisfied the devil; but la! I know now where Satan's seat is. Well, you've sat down in it; some day you'll find it hot."

"Not till May," replied Dorothea, "I shall be gone before then. But you'd better depart if you're quite sure you mean it this time."

"Your rank may be some sort of protection," was the handmaid's rejoinder, "though I don't see how it should be, for God's no respecter of persons; but I can't stay in this hotel any longer. It isn't a fit place for a maiden like me."

"Who has been making love to you now?" asked Dorothea, fastening on her father's bracelet.

"The way that that under-cook behaves is such as no self-respecting maiden could endure!"

"So you fly before the enemy?"

Rebecca grinned. "But not before I've beat him," she cried. "I threw his pink cream in his face. I'll teach him to foist his French slops on me. 'It's not even riz,' I said, and 'Creams don't riz,' says he (I suppose), but I——"

"La Poste," spake a voice at the door, and the concierge handed in a black-edged letter, and also a note from the Colonel: "A. Foye has asked me to join them at the 'London House.' Sleep well." She dismissed Rebecca immediately, and as she turned, with the black-edged letter in her hand, she caught a long glimpse of her figure in the modest demie-toilette that the uncouth maid had condemned. Decidedly the Colonel dressed her admirably, with simplicity, distinction, and expense.

She sat down to her black-edged letter, but already she knew, from the writing, its contents. The old pastor of Brodryck was dead. He had sent his love to Dorothea.

She recalled Rebecca. "Tell them I shall not come down to dinner," she said. "When you have definitely made up

your mind about going, we can discuss the *when* and the *how*. You have threatened and refused so often. But of course you must do as you like."

Rebecca lifted up both lank hands to the ceiling. "Do as I like?" she cried. "Thank Heaven, I have *never* done as I liked! They only can do as they like who like to do wickedness! And you declining the food God sends you, and it has to be paid for just the same!" She shuffled out of the room.

Dorothea returned, with a sigh of relief, to the troublous repose of her thoughts. All her old life came back to her in the minister's loss. She sat by the smouldering wood-fire, and saw in its fading glow the winter village out yonder enshrouded by mists; saw the aunts at their desolate tea-table, uncle Tony hallooing in the woods.

Presently she unlocked her little travelling-desk and found a bit of paper in it. The hurry of leaving home had caused her somewhat to overlook at the time the old pastor's birthday message, but the words of those who have passed into the eternal silence suddenly start from the changeless page into almost painful activity. The text the good man had sent her did not convey much immediate meaning to such sheltered lives as hers: "And to keep yourselves unspotted from the world!"

"And to keep yourselves unspotted from the world." Mechanically she sat stroking the back of one hand with the other, as if to wipe off the dim stains of the day. What had happened to her to make her feel soiled as well as saddened? She seemed to see herself in a far, far distance, dressing in this room this morning, to go with the Rodens to Monte Carlo. And now she sat in this room again and had come back, and a dozen dead words were burning down into her bosom, alive with a red-hot glow like the depths of awakened embers.

She went and drew aside the window-curtains, to let some coolness in upon her heat. All the wide host of heaven poured down their radiance upon her. She stood for a moment, distressed. These were the same stars that smiled on aunt Mary's lonely walks at even, the same that pierced through the unshrouded casements into the deserted chamber at Brodryck House. She wondered if her father ever recalled that room, with its empty bedstead? Yes, the stars were the same. It was a stale thought, like all great thoughts: thousands of desolate sorrowers had found in it

slow consolation. Her head sank on the window-ledge. She had not wept since she kissed the aunts good-bye. Like all the few women who seldom cry, she detested tears. But to-night she shed them freely on the freshly-fallen blots that no tears could weep away.

She kept on her dinner-dress, to avoid all questions, and sat up late, waiting for the Colonel to return. It was past one ere she heard him and could go across to his door. He turned, irritably. "What on earth?—Why, Dorothea?—anything the matter?" He threw his silk neckerchief over a couple of photographs, loose on the table, but already Dorothea had perceived that they represented a very *décolletée* "Madame de Barvielle." An odour of spirits pervaded the room: the Colonel looked flushed.

"Father," she said, standing, very white, by the door, "I wanted to ask you, do you care about stopping at Nice? Would you take me somewhere else for a little?"

Colonel Sandring stared, open-mouthed, and his daughter could not help wishing he would pull his face together. "Leave Nice!" he exclaimed at last. "What! the week before the Carnival? Why, people are glad to get a bed on a billiard-table! All the festivities are coming on! Really, Dorothea, you are hard to please. Pray, where do you want to go to?"

"I thought, perhaps, Italy—Florence——"

Her father burst into almost ribald laughter. "I certainly hadn't credited Count Pini's eloquence with such immediate effect!" he cried. "He is coming to lunch on Sunday: you must ask him to show you his place himself. Really, Dolly, I cannot start off with you, romance-hunting in Italy. Besides, where is the money to come from? Your uncle Tony has just written that he won't even send enough to buy you clothes."

He held open the door for his daughter to pass out, and kissed her on the forehead, with breath that was full of wine.

CHAPTER X.

CARNIVAL week is of course the culminating point of the Riviera season. All the light world of Paris, deserting for a few nights the disconsolate boulevards, pours down to the Mediterranean in whirlpools of gaiety and fills with a sudden wide scintillation of extravagance the palm-groves and palaces of the South. The fairest pearls that glitter in the locks of sea-born Venus she now shakes in sad profusion along this favoured coast. You can have the facile jewels for the lifting : but they cost you all a man is worth. You can stand aside and stare : so do, in vast-mouthed admiration, the great hordes of eager trippers, now more numerous than ever, brought across, in teeming shiploads, in the gross (gross, and by the gross) at fifteen guineas, there and back. Back—it is an excellent arrangement, but what avails it us, O blind leaders of the blind—as long as you send fresh ones out ?

After one long night of vain self-torment and two short nights of youthful slumber, Dorothea enjoyed the Carnival. A daughter's sight must be very clear not to ignore her father's faults. She went through all the festivities with the Rodens, her friends and protectors—yes, undoubtedly Egon von Roden protected her a very great deal. Konrad once suggested that she might deem Egon officious, but, then, Konrad says disagreeable things. Dorothea does not : in the gladness of her heart she rejoiced to tell her father, how much she was pleased with the costumes, the fun and the flowers. Sandring did not answer : " You see ! " but only : " My dear, I'm so glad." Every one who first beholds a battle of flowers is charmed with it : rumour says there are people who can even take part in two. Why Archie and " Dickie " have been to a dozen : the Countesses Kauenfels, old-time residents, to none.

" It's the best joke going," says Archie ; " I wouldn't miss one for the world ! " And indeed, in these days of rowdyism and shying the practical humour of the Northerner has a

splendid time. The native, whose idea was gallantry, coquetry, light flinging of bouquets, stops away from a free fight with bunches of stock.

Along the unending esplanade that skirts with its border of white hotels the proud sweep of the Baie des Anges, between bright clouds thronging the stands full of banners and music, crawled in ascending and descending lines the decorated vehicles, come to do battle. The sunshine streamed down on them, glorifying everything: the whole scene was beautiful with brilliant light. On they moved, amid very little laughter or pleasantry, comically solemn, masses of mimosa, under the silent shower of the nosegays that fell from the stands to the carriages, from the carriages to each other and again to the stands. Some of the bunches were very dirty, and had been picked up a good many times out of the road before they were aimed at your face. Every now and then a really beautiful carriage came by, containing a star, at her zenith in Paris, or else probably a Russian prince; these were accompanied on their passage by the running applause of the crowd. The Rodens arrived in a four-horse brake, a big cloud of anemones and carnations, with the occupants also all white and red. The young people were in very high spirits, inclined to mock at the General's protestations of æsthetic incongruity. The mother spoke of pitying the poor down-trodden blossoms in the roadway. The children laughed and threw flowers.

"Nobody looks rational but the horses," said the General, "for the horses are consciously absurd. See that poor thing over yonder trying to whisk away from its harness what it knows has no right to be there!"

"It ought to be proud of such violets," began Egon. "That's one of the best—oh, I say!"

The Baroness Blanche de Fleuryse, who had just risen in her bower of white lilacs and violets, ready to inundate the approaching brake, suddenly offered only a sight of her white and lilac back, while she scattered the odorous contents of her hands to a group of delighted roughs behind the palings. But the reckless Pini, leaping from beside her, presented to Dorothea Sandring an enormous bouquet of camellias, with a blue forget-me-not "D" in the middle and the tricolor of Italy pendent from the stem. The two carriages rolled on. Signor Pini stood kissing his finger-tips to the company, in white piqué

and violet hat-band, very smart, down the middle of the road.

"Why, that is the man they told me was winning such sums at Monte Carlo!" cried General von Roden. "Is he a friend of yours, Colonel? You might get him to give you a tip."

But the furious Fleuryse received Pini very badly. "Choose, then, some other occasion," she said, "for paying your court to Dorothee!"

"But why? We shall soon be, all four, a united family! For my secret the Colonel would sell me his soul."

"You are mistaken. Colonel Sandring cares nothing for acquiring money: he spends it just the same."

"Possibly! But in him is aroused the gambler's curiosity. He *must* know. There is only one way: he will take it."

"Ciel, yonder is the Biermädel with the old Count von Roden! Everything is achievable nowadays for all of us!"

Pini smiled meaningly. "When I have conquered my angel and my millions," he said to himself, "dear mother-in-law, farewell!"

A few moments later Egon received a blow in the face, which knocked off his hat, and glanced up to see Lady Archibald grinning at Konrad.

"You look as if you had been beaten in battle," said the General.

Egon smiled. "You have not seen, sir," he answered, "the wounds of my foe."

"Father," began Dorothea that evening, "this is the second time Signor Pini has given me a bouquet. The last was given in private, when he lunched here. I suppose there is no harm in his bringing me flowers. He is old enough to be my grandfather."

"Thank you," answered the Colonel, piqued. "He is about my age, as a fact. And some people think he looks younger. He is wonderfully well preserved."

"Only—I—thought—" continued Dorothea, not understanding one word of the Colonel's reply, "that, seeing he is so poor——"

"He isn't poor a bit. Not really poor. He—he pretends to be."

"But he gives lessons——"

"Well, yes, they—they amuse him. He has a most generous heart, and his one idea is to diffuse the finest

language in the world. "He gives lessons from patriotism!" added the Colonel, carried away by his own ingenuity.

"Dear me," said Dorothea, distress in her grave eyes, "and I offered him money."

"You should not have done that, Dorothea. Never offer anybody money. If they need it, the offer is injudicious; if they don't, it is absurd. You are very young, Dorothea; you have still a great deal to learn, my dear."

"Yes," answered Dorothea. "It is good of you to teach me, father. You are patient with me."

"Signor Pini loves to do good, like your aunts. He reminds me, in many ways, of your aunts."

"I—I see," replied Dorothea.

"And you will have to accept another bouquet from him, I fear, for he has offered to conduct you on Sunday night to the big redoute at the Casino."

"No—no, father, not that," said the girl, suddenly agitated. "Not to that rowdy Sunday thing—I can't go to that place."

The Colonel threw up his head, a way he had got into with his daughter, which was not conducive to her peace. "Why, everybody goes," he said. "You can leave before midnight. Really, Dorothea, it's almost impossible to find out beforehand what you want to do, or won't do."

"Madame de Roden said we must not go there," answered Dorothea, almost rebelliously. "She is going to take us on Tuesday to the Veglione at the opera."

The Colonel reddened furiously, in a way Dorothea had never seen before. "Oh, well, of course," he said, "Madame de Roden knows," and he flung out of the room.

A moment later, however, he came back smiling. "Do just as you like, dear, in everything," he said. "No two women I ever met had the same ideas as to what is improper. By the bye, I forgot to say, I happened to hear of a maid for you, and I told them to send her to-morrow. I suppose your wooden-faced respectability remains firm in her resolve to desert you, as soon as the Carnival's over?"

"Oh yes, she's dreadfully homesick, poor thing!" said Dorothea.

"All the same, she can wait until after the Carnival."

Dorothea laughed. "She says she remains in her room all day. She hasn't left the hotel, she says, although her cook entreats her to join him."

"You take my word," replied the Colonel, "there is no cook. If there were, she'd go with him to the Casino redoute."

Dorothea laughed louder. "Oh, father, how harshly you judge of women!" she said. "And yet you couldn't do an unkind thing to one of us. You'd take Rebecca to a party, if she asked you."

"No, no; against ugly women I am adamant," replied the gallant Colonel.

Still Dorothea only laughed. She went up and patted her father's cheek. "You couldn't refuse a service to the ugliest," she said.

"Well, don't you get homesick," replied her father. "That would be too great a trial to my vanity. I'll do anything you wish, if you'll only like me, Dolly."

Next morning Rebecca popped her head through her young mistress's door.

"There's a Jezebel asking to see you?" she said.

"Bring her in. Why a Jezebel, Rebecca?"

The handmaid again popped her head through the door. "Because I should like to cast her body to the dogs," she barked, and retreated.

The new-comer, a mild little person in black, gazed after her with expressionless eyes.

"Have you—certificates?" asked Dorothea, who supposed this was the first thing one said.

"From all the best families in Europe," came the instant reply.

"Surely you—exaggerate?" suggested Dorothea faintly.

"Perhaps, then, I should have answered, in France. But the result is the same. Are not the best families in France the best families in Europe, mademoiselle? No, I do not exaggerate. I have served in these."

"But—presuming your age to be about forty-five—have you, then, not changed rather often? At my home no servant was ever sent away."

"My age is thirty-nine, Mademoiselle. I admit that I have not stayed long in one family. A very superior maid seldom does. And the reason of my departure has always been the same."

Dorothea looked interrogation. The Frenchwoman sunk her eyes to the ground. "Yes, the reason has always been jealousy," she said. "I have been a maid for more than twenty years. In the first ten it was always madame who was

jealous ; in the last ten it was always monsieur. Can I help it, if employers appreciate my services ? But, behold, I have enough of 'ménages.' When I heard that mademoiselle is unmarried, I applied. Mademoiselle is not desirous to marry ?"

"No, indeed."

"Just so. And the certificate from my last situation, see, it would enable me to obtain any other. I could hire myself, if I chose, to a queen !"

Dorothea took the proffered paper.

"I certify that Mademoiselle Aurélie Bombard has been maid to my recent wife during eighteen months, and that during all this period she succeeded, by her skill alone, in making her mistress look ten years younger and ten times prettier than she actually was.

"VICOMTE DE MONTESPINE."

"The lady died ?" said Dorothea softly.

"The lady ran away with an officer of twenty-three. She was more than forty. Often have I heard the young officer say to her : 'Cécile, do not deceive me ; thou wilt never see thirty again !' And she would truthfully answer : 'Mon ami, I will not deceive thee ; I never shall. I am fully thirty. I am the "femme de trente ans," first invented by Balzac.'"

All this was more or less Greek to Dorothea. She sat gazing at the certificate and trying to realise, among her not numerous acquaintances, a Dutch Vicomte de Montespine.

"In the case of mademoiselle, I should have no scope for the special talents which endeared me to the Vicomtesse. But I have others. I can teach many things of which mademoiselle is certainly ignorant. Also I can foretell the future from the cards. My mistresses have guided their lives by my science and their happiness was assured."

"Did you foretell," asked Dorothea, smiling, "that the Vicomtesse would run away ?"

"No science was required for that," replied the French maid demurely. "But I foretold that the officer would run after her."

"I am sorry, but I hardly think——"

"And that—which is, to the last moment uncertain—the husband would not."

"I do not think this situation will suit you," said Dorothea with great decision.

"Excuse me, mademoiselle, but I think it will suit me very well; that is what I said to monsieur, your father, when he engaged me. 'Ah, je ne veux plus des ménages, Monsieur le Colonel: c'est trop agitant et c'est trop monotone. Une jeune fille, voilà mon affaire!'"

"My father has engaged you!" cried Dorothea.

"But, certainly, he has engaged me and paid me my first term. I had three offers already. I am not the first comer; I have nothing in common, for instance, with the person who has just quitted the room."

As soon as she could find her father, Dorothea protested against his choice of a maid.

He listened gently. "My dear," he said at last, "what a terrible habit you have of disapproving. It makes life so laborious. This person is an absolute treasure, a pearl. You are charming, child, you know I think you charming, but there are a hundred little things—*enfin!* This woman is precisely what you need. I consider her a God-send—yes, actually a God-send. She will teach you exactly what men like and what they don't."

"But——"

"There, that is the word which spoils all our conversations! It is the ugliest word upon pretty lips. You are suddenly left unprovided—I procure you a marvel, and what do you answer me? 'But——'" He shook his finger at her; his eyes were full of fond reproach. Thus it came about that Dorothea Sandring got Mademoiselle Aurélie Bombard for a daily companion and adviser.

"I have written to Miss Mary," announced Rebecca, as she harshly brushed her young mistress's hair.

"Why? You will see her in three days' time."

"God willing!" corrected Rebecca. "Well, I have written to say that I left you in the devil's hands."

"How dare you so frighten her?" exclaimed Dorothea.

"She will think I have quitted my father."

"I said you were in the devil's hands," retorted Rebecca with grim content, "and that you refused to budge. *I've done my duty.*"

Dorothea made no reply, distressfully musing on aunt Mary's probable distress.

"As for that person downstairs," continued Rebecca, pulling hard at the hair, "as for that—that——"

"I know whom you mean: you've left off abusing the cook. Well?"

"*She'll* look after you. Do you know how she calls you downstairs, Freule? 'The lamb!'"

"There's no harm in that, is there? I suppose she feels like my shepherdess, now."

Rebecca sniffed, in deepest revolt and scorn. "When a servant calls a mistress her lamb, it means that the servant's the wolf," she said. "And that the servant knows it."

"Come with me to the German church," answered Dorothea. But Rebecca said she had no time for churches that wasn't churches. She must pack; she was leaving on the morrow.

On that Monday morning of her intended departure she appeared at Dorothea's bedside with a countenance all wreathed in grins.

"Freule, I've been thinking. I'm not going home," she said.

Dorothea opened her sleepy eyes. "Why, the other maid's engaged," she said.

"Oh, I know the other maid's engaged. I wouldn't trouble you, Freule. I am glad to think you've got a maid as'll suit you, at last!"

Dorothea lay back, helpless.

"But *I'm* engaged too," cried Rebecca, bolt upright and crimson. "I'm going to marry that cook!"

"What?" screamed Dorothea.

"I'm going to—marry—that cook. Of course as soon as he means matrimony, in church, it's *very* different. He's going to set up an eating-house, and he won't find a clean Dutchwoman to manage it every day. And yesterday afternoon, when he heard I was going, he asked me, in the midst of all that foolish dirt-flinging—and the foolishness and dirtiness of the people in these parts nobody at Brodryck would believe, not if they saw them doing it. No wonder he wants a change."

"I do believe you went to the 'Confetti!'" cried Dorothea.

"I went to see the depths of abomination! I thought it was the times before the deluge! And my soul cried aloud for an ark!"

"Well, you've found your Noah. Can he understand you? Was Noah before Babel or after?—I forget."

"There's a German cook-boy in the kitchens translates for us. But *I'll* learn him Dutch, in six months—don't you fear."

Dorothea sat up in bed. "And, oh Rebecca! he *can't* be a Catholic?"

"Catholics don't count with me," replied Rebecca coolly. "Catholics is no religion at all, nothing but flummery and dolls. He has *not* too much religion, Freule—but no religion's a great deal better than a lot of make-believe, like *some* people's—(Dorothea looked suddenly away); and I'll turn him into a God-fearing Christian in six months' time: you may make your mind easy about that."

"Rebecca, you must be joking!"

The woman bridled. "And why shouldn't I marry, pray?—when I'm asked? There's older than I, of both sexes, anxious to make matches, if all that I'm told is true."

The Colonel, when he heard the news, laughed till he could laugh no more. He peremptorily rejected all idea of interference.

"My dear," he said, "she hath her age: let her speak. Keep her apart from your new maid: thank your stars, and telegraph to your aunts."

But Rebecca's sweetheart had already done this. The old ladies received the following despatch:

"Retour remis. Mademoiselle se marie."

"Dorothea!" cried aunt Emma. The paper dropped from her trembling fingers.

Aunt Mary stooped and—with trembling fingers—picked it up. "I—I had expected this," said aunt Mary timidly. "In the last letters it seemed to me that she—she spoke of the young German in a manner—oh, most modestly—still, between the lines I fancied one might read that——"

"What?" demanded Emma, as Mary stuck.

"He—he was not indifferent to her."

"Pooh, what do you know of love?" said Emma, sitting down angrily. "I have noticed nothing of the kind. Love wants experience, Mary."

"True," admitted Mary timidly.

At this stage each lady remarked that the other was crying, so they immediately sent for uncle Tony. The latter replied that he was busy, having arranged to take a couple of the orphan Lesters rabbit-shooting. Aunt Mary looked at the clock. "He will be here in ten minutes," she said. Uncle Tony, having no fixed occupations, was always excessively busy.

As soon as he arrived, with his two dogs at his heels, in his usual brown shooting things, the ladies informed him of Dorothea's intended marriage. Uncle Tony placed

himself in front of the fire, a dog seated on either side; the dog rubbed a big mild head against uncle Tony's thighs.

"Of course," said uncle Tony.

"Pooh!" cried Emma, "you think every woman wants to marry!"

"Alas, no!" sighed the old gentleman, with a comical grin. Then his jolly face grew solemn. "I hope Dorothea wants to," he said.

Aunt Mary rose and went up to him. "For God's sake, tell me what you mean!" she gasped. Her whole face was working with emotion.

"Why, calm yourself, my dear," laughed Emma nervously. "Marriage is—a—pleasurable experience, I believe. True, I never desired it for myself, but Dorothea——"

Uncle Tony took aunt Mary's hand and gently forced her to sit down. "When Dorothea went away," he said, "I told you I expected her back in a fortnight"—"with your usual acumen," interposed aunt Emma. "To my astonishment her father kept her, but now I understand it all." He paused for a moment, gaping at the poor old creatures, then he burst out:

"He's found that he can't work his gold mine, and so he has sold her!"

"How coarse you are!" said Emma, fanning herself with a religious newspaper.

"You see, being English, he thought she was of age, but she isn't, and he can't touch her money. By marriage she comes of age at once, and he's sold her!"

Aunt Mary nodded her sad face to the wood fire. "Yes, women are bought and sold," she said softly, as if to herself.

"But if you'd foreseen all this, you might have avoided it," remarked Emma tartly.

"I didn't foresee Dorothea's going off and getting married. I thought she had too much character for that," replied Tony ruefully. "And I thought the little trip to the Riviera would do the child lots of good. 'Tisn't natural she should spend all her life with three old fogies like us."

"True, that is what I thought," murmured Mary.

"Antony," cried Emma, "I always said you were a——" She stopped.

"I don't know what you said, but it's true," answered Tony.

Mary turned. "Listen," she said. "I had presentiments enough, but I chose to consider them selfishness. Perhaps

that was selfishness. 'It was so easy to keep her and be happy, so easy to let her go and be sad. So difficult, so difficult, to know what is best for *her*. And yet that is all that matters, isn't it?' She got up. "I am going to my child!" she said.

They stared at her in amazement. The very dogs stopped rubbing and stared. Only the stupid cats purred on.

"Yes, I am going," she said. "It would have been absurd to go at once, and selfish; we should have been unwelcome. But this is too important a crisis. I must go."

"But, my dear creature——"

She went close to Tony and put her hand on his shoulder. "Oh, Tony," she said, "marriage is a very terrible thing."

"Gracious, how tragical you are!" cried Emma. "You've never travelled, to speak of. You can't start, in mid-winter, at your age!"

"God will help me," said aunt Mary. "I believe travel in foreign countries is not—not so arduous as it used to be."

"If you go, I must take you," said Tony.

"We must all go together, then," cried Emma. "There is only one thing I regret."

"What is it?" asked Tony.

"That the Carnival will be over," replied Emma lightly. "I should like to have seen a battle of flowers."

But a moment later she sighed. As she had recently pointed out to uncle Tony, Mary, in these latter days, needed a great deal of cheering up.

CHAPTER XI.

ON the evening of Shrove Tuesday Dorothea dined quietly with her father before going to the great final Veglione at the opera. The wonderful spectacle of the afternoon still hung cinematographed in her eyes. She had seen—unforgettable sight!—the second day of the “Confetti” in its glory. From a window under the long Sea Terrace, like a theatre-box, her eager glances had swept, behind their mask, the vast square of the Prefecture, framed in tall stands of gay crimson and banners, stands that groaned under thousands of costumed spectators, while down below, far as farthest eyesight could penetrate, whirled, whistled, shouted and sang, with endless capering, and screechings, tens of thousands more mountebanks, as brilliantly costumed, in all colours of the rainbow and fancies of fairyland, a mad, merry medley of noise and of music, round the long, slow procession of the cars. Up they came, with perpetual twistings through the dense mass of frantic human movement, the cavalcades, analcades, chariots, troops and groups of young maskers, in every extravagance and beautiful combination of gaudiness, under the steady downpour of the confetti. High up, from an azure dome, the golden sunshine streamed over all the white buildings, over the whirlpools of dancers that eddied, a carpet of colours, an unresting kâleidoscope, on all hands, out of reach. Down came the clouds of confetti from the blaze of blue, yellow and crimson on the stands; up went, without interruption, the clouds of confetti from the multitudes screaming below. Meanwhile the procession struggled forward, turning as well as it could, before the tribunes, anxious to show off and gain prizes: gorgeous riders in the exquisite costumes which civilisation has banished to carnivals, caricatures, travesties, living puns, walking satires, plays upon events of the day and on politics, jokes and take-offs innumerable, amusing or otherwise, and, between all this, the great cars, moving platforms on

wheels, built up with amazing expenditure of taste, money and care. Here passes, amid loud outcries from a band of comic monkeys, a huge machine, high as the houses, which alternately cranes aloft the pink sucking-pigs and the babies that dance around its base, holds them up in mid-air for a moment, engulfs them, and produces strings of sausages down below; there approaches, enormous, all sails set, yet nine white oxen draw it, the Galleon of Flora, white silk and golden, resplendent with garlands, while the fifty attendants of the goddess, robed as different virgin flowers, shed each her particular blooms, to the music of symbols and clarions, on the restless crowd beneath. Yonder draws near—behind that gang of howling dervishes—the Stithy of Vulcan, a lurid glory of crimson—you can see its red glow already, with the red devils dancing—already you can hear the click-click of its hammer, but the skipping, yellow mass before it stops its progress, while two other cars are turning in the sunlight and the rain of chalk and plaster—on they come, the dancers and the prancers, horse and foot and chariots intermingled, curvetting and singing in the constant blare of music, a phantasmagoria of brightness, wildness and jollity, a Christmas dream of wonderland gone mad.

Dorothea lay back after dinner, exhausted, her eyes closed, re-seeing it all. The Colonel hemmed and hawed over his coffee, and got up and sat down, not himself.

Dorothea opened her eyes on him with great solicitude. "I *hope* you haven't caught cold again at that window," she said. "You are so susceptible, dear father, to colds."

"It's that abominable chalk they throw about," replied the Colonel. "Dolly, I should like to speak to you for a moment. H'm! There's plenty of time before you dress."

Dorothea sat up at once with that dreadful practical air he disliked so in a woman. She even moved off her very lazy lounge to a chair by the lamp, which was absurd.

"You needn't look so expectant," he said, rolling a reflective cigarette. "It's an awful nuisance to have to speak about money; I never do. But I am compelled to inform you that this uncle Tony, 'as you call him, has behaved in a most unconscionable manner."

"Oh, father, he's a dear man," cried Dorothea.

"So I find him," replied the Colonel drily. "Well, he refuses to allow more than five hundred pounds for your keep."

"But to him that seems a large sum ; he has no idea of expenses like ours. Is five hundred pounds too little ? It must be because we buy such expensive clothes. I suppose there is no more."

"Is no more ?" exclaimed Sandring, dropping the cigarette. "Do you mean to say that you have absolutely no conception of your possessions ? You will have four thousand a year on the day you come of age or marry ; five thousand when I die."

"Don't, father ! That seems a great deal of money. I don't think the aunts can know," said Dorothea gravely.

"Oh yes, they do. I wonder what reason all these people have had for keeping you in the dark"—a shade of suspicion passed over the Colonel's frank countenance. "Well, of course, the subject is at all times a disgusting one ; you see how long I have avoided it. Still, it is simply ridiculous, Dorothea, that yonder person should go on piling up all this money while you and I are distracted with efforts to make both ends meet."

"Are we ? I am sorry," said Dorothea, vexed and puzzled.

"My dear, I have spared you as long as I could." The Colonel rose and slowly struck a match. "Do you know, I believe, as your father, I could take all your money away from uncle Tony ?"

"Oh, don't ; it would hurt him dreadfully !"

"Well, I won't. Besides, there would be a lot of unpleasantness, and these very pious people would say things I would rather not hear said. I don't pretend that I have ever been able to look after property. Well, child, only one thing remains for us ; we must spend the money just the same, while he's hoarding it over there."

"I don't understand," said Dorothea.

The Colonel sighed. "It is very simple. We can easily get a man to lend us whatever we want if we promise to repay him afterwards."

"Oh, then, do, father," replied Dorothea brightly. But her voice changed as she added, "Can that really be done satisfactorily ?"

Sandring had taken a paper from his despatch-box. "Of course it can," he said. "You have only to sign this ; that is all."

Dorothea took the bond and looked at it. "Sign ?" was all she said.

"Yes, I suppose you have signed documents before?" remarked her father testily. He was annoyed at her trying to master the meaning of the deed, a thing he would certainly not have done at her age.

"Yes; soup-tickets," answered Dorothea. The Colonel bit his lips under the seeming insult of the innocent reply.

"We cannot live on two thousand," he said, with an under-note of irritation. "This is merely a loan of another thousand to be repaid when you come of age."

"And if I were to die before then?"

"Well, I suppose I should be your natural heir. But you are not going to die." The Colonel watched the firm letters forming on the paper. He laughed. "It is a sort of inverted post-obit," he said, "drawn by a father on his child. We might as well have made it two thousand. Well, I hardly know. These scoundrelly money-lenders charge such a——. In a week or two, I trust, we shall neither of us need money. We shall have heaps of it and to spare!" He rubbed his hands softly; his eyes shone.

"How will that come about?" said Dorothea.

"I have my idea. Dear child, do not look so solemn; you are going to a Carnival ball. There is another subject of far greater importance than this paltry bit of inevitable business, about which I must say half a word."

"Well, father!" She knew him so well by this time, she thought he was going to give some advice about her dress.

"You must have remarked for some time Count Pini's evident attentions. Do not be surprised if he take advantage of his mask to put you this evening a very important question—the sweetest a woman can ever hear."

"Father!" Dorothea started, kindling, to her feet.

"Do not be so frightened, child. He has confessed to me, what every one can see, that he is deeply in love with you. He is of high birth; he has recently come into a very great fortune. You have made no secret of your enthusiasm for his splendid career. Oh, my dear, you have behaved with perfect propriety! But of course he has perceived that you admired him."

"Father!" said Dorothea again.

"He is not young, but neither is he old. He is just the right age for a husband to so inexperienced a girl. I think you are acting very wisely, Dolly. You have my heartiest congratulations." He held out both hands.

"But, father, I can't marry him ; I don't love him," said Dorothea piteously.

"Of course you do not. I should be very sorry if a daughter of mine 'loved' any man before he proposed to her. My dear girl, I leave you absolutely free ; that goes without saying. But I think you are making an admirable use of your liberty. I am delighted with this match. I should feel broken-hearted if anything came between."

He made good his escape. He felt that he had managed the business exceedingly well. Blanche was so clever. And he honestly felt also that he was doing his very best for Dorothea, who would marry a man she admired and make a magnificent match. Pini had stuck immovably to his conditions ; the fortune of the "divine" Dorothea, to whom the Italian had devoted his susceptible heart, would, as basis of the wonderful system, render both father and husband millionaires.

Dorothea was still standing in the middle of the room when, ten minutes later, the two ladies Roden and Konrad suddenly filled it with the ring of their laughter and the rustle of their silks.

"Is your father ready ? My dear Dorothea, we must help you to dress ! Egon could not be persuaded to come."

"Ah !" said Dorothea.

"He is staying with father. Egon, you know, is the member of the family whom the others always select for self-sacrifice. I offer for conscience sake, but I quite expect Egon to do what I don't want to. Some people are made that way, don't you think ?" These last words came from Gertrude, the daughter.

"Gertrude is always so precise in her facts," said Madame von Roden, smiling. "That comes from her taste for exact science, you know. You cannot imagine what trouble we had to get her to come away."

They rather dreaded informing the Colonel that they lacked a cavalier. But he took the matter very coolly. Perhaps they would find one in the ball-room, he said.

And, indeed, scarcely had they entered the brilliant opera-building, when a masked figure stepped forth from the flood of gay costumes and bowed low under the blaze of chandeliers. By the bow alone Dorothea would have recognised Pini. He was beautifully attired in the dress of an Italian grandee before the Great Revolution, with abundance of wine-coloured velvet, white satin, gilt,

powder and lace. Dorothea observed the long-drawn distinction of his bearing, as he rested one hand on his sword-hilt and the other on the star at his breast.

"Beautiful masque," he began in his sonorous French, "will you do me the honour of taking a few steps by my side?"—and he led her through the crush of the maskers, amid the buffoonery, the pirouettes and the cat-calls, that almost drowned the music of the waltz. "How stupid it all is!" he said suddenly, as a masculine ballet-girl touched with his fan the maskless portion of Dorothea's cheek. "Let us go up to my box; you will see better there."

He led her into the box: he got her an ice which she did not want. She was very troubled. Stretching over the front she gazed down on the seething masses of colour and noise beneath. Somehow, in this clouded, perfumed, close-smelling enclosure at this late hour of the night, the Carnival, which had seemed rather harmlessly mad in the sunshine, looked evil, a thing to avoid.

"I think we ought to be going home," she said, rising. "Madame de Roden did not intend to stop long."

He laid three delicate fingers on the pink folds of her domino. "Do not go yet," he entreated, "I have something to say—I shall say it very simply. I shall pay you no compliments. Bellissima, carissima, will you make me the happiest of mortals?" He took off his mask as he spoke, and, bending one knee to the ground, leant forward from his armchair, middle-aged, a little faded, but supremely elegant, in the beautiful, courtly dress.

She would have spoken, trembling with agitation, but he stopped her.

"I know that I have nothing to offer," he said. "You have everything. Well, I am willing to accept. The more honour you do me, the prouder I shall be."

The music was very noisy; the dances were whirling wildly. Great clouds of perfumed heat rose, spreading, from below.

"I cannot marry you, Signore," said Dorothea softly.

Signor Pini bent to catch the repeated words.

"I cannot marry you," said Dorothea firmly.

He cast a sharp glance at her, and the expression of his features changed, as did also the tone of his voice.

"You do not mean what you are saying," he answered. Then, as she only plucked at her frills—

"I am not young," he said with strident conviction, "but neither am I finished, and I have seen more and done more than younger men. I am a Count of the Holy Roman Empire, or can be, whenever I choose. I am on the point of acquiring a very large fortune—well?" He spoke like a man of business; with his prosperity all the romance seemed to have dropped out of his voice. "After all, I am not such a contemptible *parti*?"

"I never thought that, but I—I do not love you."

She spoke so low, in all the noise, behind her fan, but he heard her. He rose to his feet, and his sword clanged between them. "That is English," he said in icy tones; "I did not know you were so English. You expect, then, to love various men, mademoiselle, on the chance that one of these may propose to you? It is not the way of the ladies of my nation, among people of my rank."

She stared at him, in astonishment that financial success should so have altered the man.

"Your feeling towards me suffices me," he continued mildly. "You have shown me more—appreciation than I had any right to expect. You mistake your own pure heart—ah, purissima!—your father understands it better than yourself."

"I am afraid my father does not understand me at all," she answered forlornly.

Count Pini drew a paper out of his white satin waistcoat and held it out to her. She took it and read:

"My dear friend.—You have my full consent, and, if I know women at all, you also have my daughter's. Do you not think the poor innocent child has sufficiently betrayed herself to render your hesitations superfluous? But they do honour to your delicacy of feeling, and on no account would I expose you to mortification, if I thought there was any fear of a rebuff.

"LEWIS SANDRING."

The letter dropped to Dorothea's feet. She stooped, picked it up, and gave it back to him.

"Thus also," he said quickly, "will you stoop, pick me up and return me to myself."

Then she took off her mask and looked straight into his eyes. "My father," she said falteringly, "is mistaken. I am very sorry." She gazed away across the loud horde of dancers: suddenly it was to her as if she saw rise up,

in the mist of ball-room atmosphere, little quiet old aunt Mary, with her close-fitting black gown, by the light of the single lantern in the dark and desolate death-room.

"Not even to please my father," she said, "would I marry a man I do not care for."

"My rank and present fortune——" he began angrily.

"And whose fortune is gained by crime."

He drew back without another word, but she turned, as he was leaving the box. "I am young!" she cried passionately. "I am stupid! I am very ignorant! My father says I have given you—encouragement"—her whole neck flamed at the word—"if it is so, and I suppose it must be—I don't quite understand—but oh, I abjectly beg your pardon!"

He only bowed again and left her. She drew the folds of her domino about her throat, and sat back, in the shadow, both hands before her face, deeply humiliated, distraught. Of herself she was not ashamed, for she could realise no actual wrong-doing, but she was sick of her surroundings, soiled to the heart. Only, she clung to her father's affection through all her disillusionment: he meant everything for the best; he was kind-hearted: her happiness was his one desire.

Signor Pini, threading his way through the multitude, sought out a splendid white figure, chiefly in sparkle and feathers, a peacock, and took her from Lord Archibald Foye, who had come as a clown.

"I have business of importance with Madame," said Pini. He led her away to a little palm-filled corner beyond the refreshment-room. "She has refused me," he said.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Blanche. "You cannot have managed things well."

"I did my best. I have not, perhaps, your experience of love affairs."

"I mean—you cannot have made full use of her father!"

"It is not pleasant, in such matters, to make full use of the father. But I believe I have done so. Ah, Santa Madre!" he ground his teeth, with the resolute suppression of his fury. "It is enough. She has refused me. She said she could not live on money gained by gambling. That was what she meant. She loves me—I do not doubt it—she refused me because I am a gambler. She said money thus gained was gained by crime!" His glance rested on the lace of his coat sleeve, and he smiled.

"By God! she is right!" cried the Baroness, fierce as a panther. "She is right, and that is why I detest her and crush her—the pretty-hearted, pure-hearted child! What business has this little Miss Mealyface to come between me and my happiness? Sandring is a fool! You, too, are a fool, Pini! I am a woman. Here, let me go to her! Leave me alone with her! I will strike her out of my path as I dash aside this glass!" She brushed away a liqueur glass from a table, in shrill clatter on the pavement, and swept up the great staircase with a far-spreading glitter of her white peacock-train.

"C'est un franc, monsieur," said the waiter to Pini.

Madame de Fleuryse pushed open the door of the box and, assuming the squeaky masquerade voice. "Bonsoir, mademoiselle," she said. "May a friend have a few moments' conversation?" Dorothea looked up at the splendid peacock figure, all silver eyes: an idea took her that this must be Lady Archibald.

"A beautiful sight," squeaked the visitor, waving her hand. "Fascinating! Strange! A little wild, perhaps? Not at all like Brodryck."

"Who are you?" asked Dorothea.

"A friend. One who is sorry to see you in uncongenial surroundings."

"Yes, I will go home," said Dorothea rising.

"Ah, I forgot. I have a message for you from the Colonel. He has gone with the other ladies to Vitellini's, to show them the supper-rooms. He hoped that your cavalier would see you home."

"You are not Lady Archibald," said Dorothea, and sat down again in despair.

"One like you will find no happiness here. The Colonel even—best of men!—is not the companion you should have. You do not appreciate his virtues."

"True," said Dorothea, and her eyes looked away, across the theatre. After a silence, she added, speaking more to herself than to the intruder. "I shall find no happiness here. I had better go home." Before this woman she meant the hotel, but the woman understood that her thoughts had strayed further—to Brodryck.

This, however, by no means agreed with the Baroness's plans, for Sandring had told her too clearly that his daughter's marriage must precede his own.

"My dear," she squeaked, "you are very silly. You do

not understand your own welfare. As for your scruples, they are not even honest. For you know perfectly well, that your father gambles all day long, that you live on the proceeds of his gambling, and supply him with funds to continue, when he's down on his luck."

Dorothea caught her breath. The whole whirlpool of dancers seemed to sail high up into the air and swing down sideways. She had the strength to put up her little mask again, covering half her face.

"Yes, I know," she said.

The woman beside her laughed.

"You are keeping him out of his happiness. Worse than that, you are causing him to continue in—what do you call it?—sin! Yes, sin. A pretty preacher! For it is you who, by refusing to marry, render impossible his marriage."

Dorothea gripped the other's substantial arm. "I do not understand," she said: "speak plainly."

"My dear, you are too simple for anything. Marry Pini. When you are married, and out of the way, the Colonel will bestow his name on a lady he has counted among his intimate friends for some time."

She had bent forward, hissing the words. Dorothea started to her feet, with a flash that flung the woman from her.

"Madame de Barvielle!" she cried.

The next moment she was out in the street. She understood everything, everything, all her father's life.

CHAPTER XII.

SHE ran along the road, in her domino. Everywhere was the sound of much laughter and dancing. Everywhere was abundance of light. The whole city roared to the skies in its revelry. The broad river twinkled along all its bridges, under myriads of coloured lanterns and gas-jets; the Casino flared, one vast illumination across the immense Place Masséna, on which thousands of yelling enthusiasts, half-mad with debauchery, were performing every possible orgy, in great circles of drunken delight. Dorothea shrank back in dumb terror, her hand on the parapet by the riverside.

She stood there a long time, not knowing where she stood. The night was beautifully mild, but she would not have noticed any change in its temperature. Even here there was no fresh air, by the river. The smoke of the great coloured fires went up from elevated platters. She closed her eyes to the lurid licence of the scene.

She could not go back to the hotel—that was all she felt—not go back and meet her father. It was not yet a couple of months since she first had seen him: she must never see him again. She thought of the journey down from Paris, of her visit to Monte Carlo, of that night when she had found him the worse for—no! only a couple of hours ago she had signed away a thousand pounds to be spent in gambling. What mattered the paltry thousand pounds?—but the gambling! to live on the produce of the tables—and the other, the unspeakable thing—the—the——

No, she could never touch his lips again.

She hailed a passing vetturino, in a sudden impulse of escape. The man looked at her, laughing. She fancied he was drunk. There was no other in sight. Perhaps he would upset and kill her? Would it matter much, if he did?

“Whither, beau masque?” said the cabman.

“To the Villa Buonarotti. Drive fast.” She would ask

Madame de Roden, who must be back long ago by this. She must tell Madame de Roden, confiding in another woman's righteous heart.

She sank her head upon her breast, in the victoria, as it fought its way across the blatant inferno of the square. "Oh Jesu, have mercy on these people! Oh Jesu, have mercy on me!" she prayed, over and over again. It seemed to her as if the placid heavens must rend asunder, and, mid the radiance of His million angels, the Son of God descend to judgment and to war.

In the short avenue of the Villa, under the cypresses, a man's figure came forward and stopped the driver.

"Is that you, Konrad? Where are the others?" asked Egon's voice.

Dorothea mastered herself by an effort such as seemed very strange to what her simple life had been until now.

"It is I," she said, "Dorothea Sandring. My party deserted me. I came here to find them."

"They have not come home yet. I was expecting them. My father has gone to bed."

There followed an awkward pause. "May I see you back to the hotel?" began Egon.

"Oh, no—no! I will wait till they come home."

"Will you come into the house?" He threw away his cigar.

"Oh, no—no! I will stop here. They will come soon." She could not ask him to leave her sitting thus by herself in the cab, as she longed to do. Her one desire was not to betray her father to him, by word or manner. The cabman grunted. His drunken presence, leering at them, became more than she could endure.

"I have no money," she said, realising the fact for the first time. "Would you pay this man and let him go?"

He obeyed, wondering, and assisted her to alight. He felt the tremor that ran along her frame, as she stood quivering by his side.

"Let us go in," he said; "you are cold."

"Oh, no—no!" she answered. "How could any one be cold? The night is beautiful." She walked quickly out of the shadow of the trees and down the shining terrace, that opened out before the house. Her heart was burning.

He came and stood beside her, against the balustrade. The air was heavy with Riviera fragrance. From below, across a mile of sleeping garden-slopes, ascended, dulled by

distance, the clamour of the Saturnalian city, a crimson blotch amongst ten thousand fire-sparks, against the deep-blue sky. And beyond, unseen, spread endless, the solemn sighing of the sea.

"Surely it is like the world before the deluge," said Dorothea. His answer came unexpected :

"You are disturbed. You have been insulted by somebody. By Heaven, I believe you have been insulted by Pini?"

He saw only the back of the pink domino. "Is it so evident," she said bitterly, "that Pini would be the person to insult me? Undoubtedly then, I am to blame for this easy coupling of our names."

"You?—he is right, when he calls you an angel. That truth, from his lips, may atone for a quantity of lies! He has insulted you, the scoundrel! He will find that you have friends who can call him to account."

"No, no!" she turned, her white hand on the parapet. "You are mistaken, Herr von Roden. Signor Pini has not exactly insulted me! You will keep silence! You would not make me unhappier than I am?"

"I would give my life to spare you a moment's unhappiness!" he burst out. "There, I have said it. It is idiotic, unless I say more. I had no business to say anything at all—but, but—Dorothea, will you give me the right to defend you against your surroundings? To save you from them? I am longing to do it, at once. Will you be my wife?"

"Against your surroundings." She asked for no explanation; she stood, unable to speak. A moment later she found herself seated on a bench beside the teeming orange-trees. She did not know whether he had led her there, or whether she had walked alone.

"It is not fair, perhaps, to take you by surprise at this moment," he continued, speaking fast and earnestly; "but I cannot restrain myself, when I see—what I see." He gasped for breath. "I do not ask you to give me an immediate answer. Only let me entreat of you, do nothing you—you don't want to do. You are so good, so good, so much better than any of us—be sure what you don't want to do is better left undone. And please remember that, at any moment, I am eager to lay my whole existence, such as it is, at your feet."

He waited for a moment, and as yet she did not answer—

"I am a poor lame beggar," he said; "it's beastly cheeky of me, asking you to marry me. But I love you so I can't help it. You're so good, you never ought to marry any ordinary man, but—but sometimes I think: If she takes some other idiot, she might just as well take me. You're like my mother, but the only man that'd make you a decent husband is the one that married *her*. Look here, I always thought, when the time came, I should say a lot of things I want to say. All I can think of now is that I want you to marry me, be—because I want you to."

Suddenly she drooped her head upon her breast, and that was all.

"Dorothea!" he cried: the tumult of passion surging across his voice was such that she sank against his extended arm, as a lily might bend under the storm.

When he spoke again a few minutes later, it was to say: "I remember now one of the things I ought to tell you, and forgot. But you know already, Dorothea,—do you not?—that either of my brothers may succeed my uncle as well as I!"

"What has that to do with—with anything?" replied Dorothea.

Then he kissed her, the second time. "Nothing, dearest, except that I am poor."

"What does that matter?" answered Dorothea, wearily, amidst her happiness. "Since I came here, money seems to me to be all wickedness. At Brodryck it looked pleasant to be rich."

The turmoil of the city mounted, changeless and monotonous, but they no longer heard it. All the liquid sweetness of the orange-blossom played about them: all the little chirps and rustlings of the gentle night arose and lulled them: all the velvet softness of the wakeful foliage sank around them—and the silver stars shone steadfast with the mysteries of God.

"My mother has come home," said Egon, "let us go to her."

Then Dorothea seemed to remember what she knew she had not for one moment forgotten, the great sorrow that had driven her here.

"We will go to her together," she answered, "and then, Egon, you must leave us alone."

They found Madame von Roden standing in the drawing-room. Gertrude, exhausted, had gone at once to her room.

"Well, Egon, it is a sight to be seen once," said the

Generalin, "but——" She turned. "This also," she cried, laughing a little hysterically, "is a sight to be seen, and without a 'but'!" She came forward and drew both her children towards her, kissing them both.

"You knew nothing," said the son.

"Nothing," she answered, "You praise my cleverness so often, Egon, but it is only in the abstract. As every occasion offers, you expect me to prove a fool."

"Mother! But I thought——"

"Quite so. Only a mother thinks more. My dear Dorothea, it is half-past one: your father will be anxious about you. Now, how shall we get you home?"

To the horror of mother and son, Dorothea's reply was a burst of weeping. Until that moment, she had not, through all the troublous evening, felt a moment's call for tears. Now she clung, sobbing, to Madame de Roden's side.

"Leave us together," said the Generalin, her own eyes moistening. And scarcely had the door closed on Egon, when Dorothea whispered:

"I cannot go home."

The Generalin only drew her closer and waited. For Madame de Roden was afraid to show, by speech, that she understood, and knew, even more than Dorothea.

"I cannot go back to the hotel. You must keep me here," murmured the latter. "Do not, please, ask me any questions! I cannot go back."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Madame de Roden.

Dorothea loosened her hold and sank back upon a sofa. "Quite sure," she gasped.

"My dear, I will ask no questions. And, having asked none, I venture to think—you see, I am an old woman—to think that you can go back."

"I cannot—you do not know!"

"I do not know. But of one thing I am certain, that, if you stay away like this, you will bring disgrace upon your father's name. And a daughter can do anything but that."

Dorothea shivered on her sofa.

"You are young: you have lived—God be praised—an exceptionally sheltered life. You know nothing of the world and its evils. You know nothing of men's temptations. I believe, before God, that the husband you have chosen to-night is honest and pure, as his own father, but—I could not say the same, not even of all my own nearest and dearest." She stopped, faltering. Dorothea looked up

into her face. The Generalin seated herself beside the girl on the sofa and took her hand.

"If I say this to you—so much!—it is because—oh, Dorothea, you can go back. Men's ideas of right and wrong are not like women's, dearest. Kiss me, child. The daughter of so brave a soldier is not less brave than he!"

They sat in silence. "To-morrow I will ask Colonel Sandring to let you come and stay a while with us," said the Generalin. "Konrad will be returning presently. He had—had some reason for staying in the town. Egon will see you home in Konrad's cab."

"I will go back," said Dorothea.

Meanwhile Egon, pacing the passage with that peculiar halt of his, roused the General, who slept on the long ground-floor.

"What, father, not asleep?" said the son in the doorway, "why, it's past one o'clock."

"'Tis then, it seems, the very witching hour of night, when ghosts do walk," replied the General, laughing gently. "I heard the carriage, Egon; why doesn't everybody go to bed?"

"Miss Sandring is here," answered Egon, uneasily, "she will be leaving in a few minutes." And he retreated into the hall.

Justus lifted himself on his pillows. "Miss Sandring in the drawing-room, and you in the passage!" said the father. "What nonsense is this, Egon?—come in at once and tell me what you've been and gone and done."

The son closed the door behind him and, standing in the dark, "Father," he said, "you must go to sleep: we can talk about things to-morrow."

But the provoking invalid struck a match and held it aloft, for a moment, until it burnt his fingers.

"Never mind," he said, dropping back into darkness. "Come here, Egon, let me grasp your hand. God bless you, my boy. And her. Poor thing! Poor thing!"

Egon broke the silence. "Yes," he said, "I must save her. The sooner the better. Father, we must get her away from—all that."

Justus held tighter the hand within his. "You must love her," he said, "that is all. Love her: be happy in her happiness, happy in making her happy, happy in being made happy by her. All successful wedlock is that, boy. The quest of our happiness in each other's. God grant it

to you: and yet you must seek it. I hear the drawing-room door. Go to her. Send me your mother. Good-night."

Egon stood still by the door. "I don't know what we shall live on," he said.

His father laughed. "Just what I said twenty-five years ago. But one does live, somehow. Of course, it is very reprehensible to start like that. What will your uncle say?"

"Egon, you're a fool."

"A wise fool," added Justus, and lay meditating on his own half-century of sunny life.

"At any rate, she won't live on gambling gains," said Egon to himself.

An hour later Dorothea stood in her bedroom at the hotel, gazing down on a telegram she had just torn open.

"We are coming. Telegraph his name to Hôtel Victoria, Paris.

"UNCLE TONY AND AUNTS."

"Whose name?" exclaimed Dorothea.

Rebecca, kept awake by curiosity alone, peered over her mistress's shoulder.

"Dutch people should telegraph in the language they was born to," remarked Rebecca. "There's Jezebel outside says she wants to come in." Indeed, a tap at the door was immediately followed by audible twists of the door-handle. Rebecca stood coughing her loudest, with "Jezebel! Jezebel! Jezebel!" between every gurgle and choke.

"Unlock the door at once. How dare you turn the key?" said Dorothea.

"Not I!" replied the handmaid undaunted. "I won't let in the wolf upon the lambkin. I'm not a hireling, thank God!"

Dorothea swept to her feet, the pink domino still hanging about her. "Open the door this very moment," she said, her quiet eyes blazing. "Do you expect me to do it for you? Or to fight with you about getting it done?"

The terrible Rebecca, with skance glances, went and sullenly unfastened the door. Mademoiselle Aurélie Bompard entered smiling, seemingly unconscious, and began immediately to move familiar articles about on the toilet-table. Rebecca, retreating, watched her with a groan that

went straight to Dorothea's heart. "Sleep well. Pleasant dreams," called Dorothea.

"Ah, Freule," replied Rebecca, disappearing, "it is not the dreams I desire for you, but an awakening!"

"Mademoiselle has a headache," said the Frenchwoman, casting one of her sharp, modest little glances at her new mistress.

"It is true," answered Dorothea, surprised, for Rebecca believed in no ailments but her own.

"I can see that. No, *yon eau de cologne* is quite useless: I have a spirit here—a few drops on a handkerchief, see!—I thought Mademoiselle would have a headache after the *Veglione*." She busied herself with deft hands and noiseless movements about her mistress's toilet. "Only the strictly necessary!" she said. "Mademoiselle is exhausted. The drops have done good, have they not? Ah, I told Mademoiselle I could do many things. I wish Mademoiselle a good rest, and pleasantest dreams of the ball. *De tous ces charmants messieurs et du bal*."

Outside, the noise of the Carnival night continued. The shrieks and laughter and music came, muffled, to her ears. Ash-Wednesday was drawing near. Unable to go to sleep, she got up and drew aside the curtains. In the distance the lights flared, constant: the turmoil of sounds rang clearer against her window-glass. She knelt down and murmured reiterated prayers, in which Egon's name now strangely and sweetly mingled, burning prayers for her father, sad prayers for a world that lieth in wickedness—suddenly her breath caught: she could not now, as in that night of the railway journey, pronounce in the presence of Almighty God the name of Madame de Barvielle. "Perhaps God will forgive her," she thought, as she lay down again, sleepless. The extremes of grief and joy she had endured combined in her exhausted brain to a tumult of torment. All the sights and sounds of the day seemed to whirl behind her eyes. She lay shivering. She had never been seriously ill, and she wondered if this was fever. Before that question had been answered in her brain, she fell into a troubled slumber.

From this she was suddenly awakened. The rushing of a mighty wind filled her ears with a roar such as she had never heard before and will never hear again. She started slightly from her pillow, to fall back immediately, rolling hither and thither, as a drop of mercury in a saucer, sick,

dead sick, at heart and brain. The whole room rose around her, uplifted, heaving sideways, tossed backwards, at all angles, like a vessel in a swifter than earthly storm. With her wide-open, giddy eyes she saw one thing happen : in the universal awryness, a creature in a pink domino came dancing, zig-zag, across the floor. She thought she screamed at that, but it was only a gurgle in her throat. The next moment she beheld the crazy dancer's countenance and recognised her own wicker dress-frame careering in the still, cold light. Then followed immediately a great crash of glass and china, as all the things from washstand and toilet-table rushed heavily to the ground, and the sound echoed on, in new volleys of crashing and creaking through all the vast building, with the dull, intense rumble passing slowly away.

Dorothea sat up, clutching at the bed-side : she believed that the corners had righted themselves, but the whole room seemed to be turning still.

"It is an earthquake," she whispered to herself, shuddering from head to foot, "it is God's judgment." And her soul grew suddenly calm.

She got up, steadying herself by the bed-posts, confusedly tottering across the room. Dragging her heavy feet to the window, she fell against its frame, and tore aside the curtain. One instant of deathly silence had hung on the train of the thunder—now shrieks and cries of every description went up on every hand in the pandemonium of a whole city's consternation, the yelling of a hundred thousand voices mad with fear.

Dorothea, at the window, stared, shuddered back, and stared again. In every direction, far as the eye could reach, poured streams of human creatures, many in night-clothes, many in carnival dresses, leaping, running, falling, screaming all. Bells were swinging, inaudible, on the other side of the river. Just in front of the hotel, on the square, lay a little group of maskers, prostrate or upon their knees. Hideous rents were visible in the walls of all the houses around, and the broad public garden was littered with pieces of chimneys, plaster ornaments and tiles. Dorothea lay staring in the clear cold, daybreak. She saw the church doors opposite burst open and a flood of morning penitents—the cross of ashes doubtless still upon their foreheads—pour out into a dancing troop of maniac harlequins, with whom they mingled, trampling each other underfoot.

Then happened the most awful thing of all, for the second shock broke suddenly across the expectant city. Mad already, men had hoped the worst was over, and lo, it came!

Dorothea found herself lying on the floor, with her head against the table; the table itself hung jammed in a corner, whither all the furniture of the room had swept before it sank away again, in broken bits. Her wardrobe had fallen forwards, with a thud that sent her heart into her mouth. It lay not far from her: she realised that she had escaped: she was alive.

The consciousness of this individual escape restored her nerves to some sort of balance. She had trusted God, a moment before, to do whatsoever He would with her: she now trusted Him to help her through.

She tore open her door with some difficulty and crossed the narrow passage to Rebecca's room. Here also the furniture had been upset: the bedstead stood near the middle of the floor, and a hump in the bedclothes proclaimed that it was still occupied. Dorothea went up and touched the hump. A wriggle was the only reply. "Rebecca!" she cried. The wriggle became a succession of violent contortions, in the course of which the whole bundle rolled away to the ground, where it found voice, lying screaming. Dorothea resolutely went round and tore aside the blankets, revealing Rebecca's congested face, of which the eyes remained tightly closed.

"Go away, devil! Go away, devil!" screamed Rebecca, at least a dozen times.

"Silence! Open your eyes. It is I," said Dorothea sternly.

Rebecca, when she had heard these words, obeyed. She tried to steady herself, a dishevelled figure, in the bundle of bedclothes. Staring, as one distraught, she evidently did not even as much as see her mistress, but continued to pour out alternate objurgation and defiance to the fiend who she thought had come to fetch her, in this final collapse of all things. "Lord, take away the devil!" she shrieked, and flung up her naked arms. "I'm a good woman; I've always been regular at church o' Sundays! No, no, it's a lie; I'm a bad woman, a bad woman, a sinner, but I'm saved! I'm saved! You can't give me up to the devil, Lord, for I'm written in the Book of Life, Lord: the fortune-teller said I was!" She began to sing and cry

together. From the street rose the rush of multitudes, and the long wail of sorrow and fear.

"Come with me at once, before another shock occurs," said Dorothea.

The maid's reply was a shriek—then suddenly, clinging to her mistress: "Is it you?" she said. "I thought the foul fiend was upon me. They're coming! They're coming! Don't you hear them? I'm a wicked creature, Freule—hear me say it, if I die this moment—I'm a mountain of iniquity, a leaven of unrighteousness, a beast accursed, and a stench in the nostrils of God Almighty. I'm a——"

"Put on your clothes at once; I shall wait no longer," said Dorothea; and she gently got together a few garments and wrapped them round the poor, shivering thing. The whole scene had only taken a minute.

Colonel Sandring stood in the doorway, completely dressed, looking very much as usual. "Dorothea," he said, in a solemnised voice, "this is, of course, an earthquake. The shocks have not been severe enough, in this part at least, to cause serious disasters. From former experiences in other climes I imagine the worst is over. But you must come down into the open at once."

"Yes, father; let me help this poor soul," replied Dorothea.

The Colonel slightly shrugged his shoulders. "By all means; only help her quick!" he said. "Fetch your warmest cloak from your room. Let us go!"

The half-unhinged door of the bed-chamber opposite hung open, with a crack down the middle. Mademoiselle Aurélie Bompard was running to and fro through her mistress's apartment, crying: "Where are the jewels?" as loud as she could cry, but her voice sounded dull in the hubbub all round. She laughed heartily, as Dorothea entered with the Colonel. "Ah, you are safe: that is right," said Aurélie. "I have this bag"—she held it out—"is there anything else worth saving?" Pink spots stood out on her yellow cheeks, and her arms and legs swung nervously, like a puppet's.

"What is this?" asked the Colonel, pointing to a man's figure prostrate on the floor.

"Some hotel servant!" Aurélie still laughed shrilly; "I found him here busy with the boxes. I had to break that jug on his head unawares. 'Tis of little account. There is crockery broken in plenty to-day—and possibly heads.

Monsieur le Colonel, if there is nothing more worth saving, would you permit me to—go downstairs?"

She curtseyed, with a little inconsequent run, as her muscles betrayed her, and ran, laughing, with the bag, to the door.

The Colonel followed, carefully piloting his daughter among the horde of distracted, half-dressed hotel guests, and deposited her, with both maids, on one of the few still unoccupied seats in the public garden. "Stay here. Keep cool. There is very little danger," said the Colonel.

Rebecca settled herself on the bench, in the clear sunshine, smoothed out her gown, gazed right and left on the scene of desolation and despair, and sniffed. "Well, it's the judgment of the Lord," she said comfortably, "and no wonder! The lion hath roared (bark): who shall not tremble? The Lord hath spoken: who shall not—not——"

"Prophecy," said Dorothea.

"Prophecy. For my part, if I was well out of this heathen country, the sooner it was swallowed up in abysses, the better. The devil's been let loose here too long, and God is beginning to talk to him. Heavens, you didn't feel another shake?"

"No," answered Dorothea, "I—I don't think so. Of course, one feels giddy. But there is no rumbling. The heaving must be in our eyes, Rebecca. Sit still."

Aurélié, a prey to continued nausea, had crept out of sight, behind some shrubs. She lay there, still clutching her mistress's bag.

"It's like Jezebel to think of trinkets in the moment of judgment," snorted Rebecca, tottering to her feet, "but as she *has* saved them, we may as well see she don't carry them off."

A moment afterwards fierce altercation, soon followed by a scream, resounded from the midst of the shrubbery. Dorothea found the two women scuffling over her bag. At least, the short struggle was just over. The French-woman had quietly drawn a hat-pin and stuck it through her aggressor's hand. "I am sorry," said Aurélié gently. "When I am compelled to stick, I sometimes stick too far!" Rebecca returned, weeping, to the bench, and Dorothea had to stanch the blood.

A little company of nuns came down the garden-walk between the groups of fugitives which lay piled up with a strange medley of belongings on every side. The nuns

were singing a "Miserere": it pealed in gentle melody amidst the groans and prayers.

"Jezebels like yon," said Rebecca, with a wave of her unwounded hand at the nuns, "and Beelzebubs like these!" She pointed to a gaudy Jester, with cap and bells, lying, manifestly drunk, in the roadway.

The Colonel came back to them. "Quick!" he said. He led them to an open fiacre standing by the kerbstone. In the fiacre was a very fat Jew gentleman, with many rings and a cadaverous countenance. "Monsieur, I must have the temporary use of this cab," said the Colonel. "You can remain in it, if you choose. It will take these ladies up to Cimiez."

"Ze cap is mine!" squeaked its occupant. "I haf pait twenty louis to sit in it. I fill not moof."

"It is the only one, and I must use it," replied Sandring. "If you like a tight fit, then you need not 'moof.' Get in, Dorothea." She hesitated, looked at him, and obeyed.

The fat man half rose, screaming. "Help!" he cried. "Murter! Sieves! Monsieur, I am ze Paron——"

"I know who you are," answered Sandring. "Sit still, you blackguard Jew, or I'll shoot you like the dog you are." The sight of a small revolver decided the uncertain coachee, even more than the offer of a couple of extra napoleons, and the whole party drove off towards the Villa Buonarotti, with the Colonel on the box.

"Give me those reins," said the Colonel presently. "Why, I do believe you're afraid, you fool."

And, indeed, the scenes through which they were slowly struggling, might have caused a stouter heart than the purple Jehu's to quail. The Jew banker had closed his eyes and lay back, livid. Rebecca, squeezed on to the little front seat with her would-be "murderess," sat loudly singing, over and over again, the first verse of the hundred and twenty-fifth psalm:

"Who in the Lord doth put his trust,
As Zion's mount shall stay,
That cannot shaken be or moved,
But doth abide for aye!"

Her shrill accents died away, however, in the clamour around them. The long Station Avenue, its tall eucalyptuses still hung with tawdry Carnival decorations, had vomited the sleepers from a hundred purlieus, half-naked,

amongst bedding, furniture and baggage in hasty encampments along the street. Scenes of hysteria and inebriety were everywhere, and worst of all was the constant rushing and calling of mothers for children, of children for mothers—the ringing of the same pet name in reiterated cries of increasing agony—Fifi! Fifi! — Jeannot! — Suzotte! Suzotte! Su—zotte!

The huge houses showed cracks in many places, some from top to bottom. Every now and then a tottering chimney or piece of cornice fell, amid shrieks and clouds of dust. A crimson devil, a reminiscence of Vulcan's stithy, careered round the carriage for a long time, with obscene language, his brain apparently gone, and offered to kiss the loud-singing Rebecca. At last the Colonel cut him with the whip, and he fell back, cursing.

Out in the Cimiez greenness was smiling Nature, cloudless sky and splendour of sunshine. Only, the birds were silent: over all things hung a stillness so painful, it seemed a threat.

"Let us get out here," said Colonel Sandring at the gate of the Villa. He flung his card into the victoria. "Ask for any reparation you choose," he said to the almost inanimate banker. "Yours, I suppose, takes the form of the police-court. All right."

The Rodens had felt the shocks less severely on their rock: they had not experienced the upheaval of the terrified city; their perturbation was that of people whose refinement has trained them to reserve. They made Dorothea welcome on the terrace, where all sat encamped with their luggage. After a few hasty words the Colonel had disappeared. As soon as he was gone, Dorothea remembered that she had not yet told him, in this hurried half-hour, of Egon Roden's proposal. Curiously enough, she had not even recalled it, herself. But she had given him the aunts' telegram from a pocket of her dressing-gown. "We must stop them," he had said: nothing more.

But within an hour he was back again: he called Dorothea into a separate corner of the garden. He was hot, and excited, but his voice was calm. "I have got a whole compartment for you in a train that leaves this afternoon," he said. "I had to buy it at auction from a man who happened to have engaged it. Never mind what I paid. The station is a fearful sight, but they have sent for the troops. We shall be able to fight our way through by three."

"You are coming too!" cried Dorothea.

"No, my dear. There is not much danger: why should there come another shock? I cannot run away to-day. You will be safe with your aunts. And, by the bye, of course I had to buy the whole compartment. You can take as many of the Rodens as you like."

"Father," said Dorothea, "Egon Roden asked me last night to be his wife."

"Well?"

"I should like to, father, if you don't mind."

The Colonel laughed. "Why should I mind," he said. "To-morrow, please God, you will be safe in Paris, with your aunts, and the prettiest romance in my life—but one—will have come to an end. Like all the best romances—at least, the live ones—it has been brief. Why should I mind, if you like to marry a good-looking and pleasant young German, very well born, with a limp, and exceedingly uncertain expectations, for I presume you are aware of the peculiar conditions of the Rheyna entail? The match *may* prove a better one than Pini: in any case, I can understand, with a young girl like you, youth and beauty outweighing a million more or less."

"Don't, father," said Dorothea. "And don't talk like that about a romance being ended."

He came to her and took her face between his hands.

"It has been very pleasant," he said. "But I am an old campaigner: my life has been a rough one, since your mother's death. I am not good enough for you, Dolly. Be honest: your chief idea of me is: Don't."

She threw her arms round him: she hid her face against his neck, the tears were coursing down her cheeks.

"Father," she whispered deep down into his collar, "when I marry, will you—will you—oh, father, will you marry too?"

He remained silent, but she felt his strong frame tremble under her: it was only by clinging to his neck that she herself remained erect.

"I do not understand what you mean," he said at last, in a dull voice.

She slid down on her knees, but her arms closed tight around him.

"I don't know what I'm saying," she whispered hurriedly; "I don't know how to say it. Oh, father, dear, darling father, the sin!—the sin! Oh, father, God is merciful—"

isn't He good to us? He has saved us this morning from a terrible death! Perhaps this is the last hour we have to live. Father dear, you are a brave man and I am a coward. But oh, father, darling father! He is willing to be merciful to all of us and help us to do right."

He tore her up towards him, to his breast. "God bless you and bless you!" he said and held her tight.

On the following day, late at night, after a journey of many delays, Dorothea entered the little sitting-room at the Hotel Victoria in Paris. The two aunts came forward to meet her. Uncle Tony hung back.

"Come to the tea-table," said aunt Mary, when all had calmed down. The hotel cat lay purring by the wood-fire. "He is better than nothing," said aunt Mary, "but it is difficult to attach any personal interest to a hotel cat." Yet she took the beast up and hid her face in its fur.

"By the time we return," remarked Emma with a tragic air, "our own will most probably all be dead of neglect."

"What, all eleven?" cried Tony, slapping his knee.

Aunt Mary produced her small face from behind the hotel-cat and smiled. "I bribed—I can *trust* Caspar," she said, "to look after them better than we—than I should. Suzie has had seven kittens, Dorothea, since you left."

"And what do you think the old creatures have done?" shouted Tony. "They've had little apertures made in the sitting-room doors, just the size for the cats to crawl in and out, with little green curtains to keep off the draught. Pish!"

"But, Tony——"

"Bosh!" snorted Tony.

"No, really, I should have done it before," expostulated Mary humbly, "only I feared Dorothea would think that she hadn't been kind about opening the doors. My rheumatics are making me so lazy: I dread having to get up from my chair."

"Rheumatism—rubbish," interrupted Emma. "You needn't have rheumatism, if only you'd take Pipperdonia. And now, Dorothea, pray tell us his name!"

"Whose name? Whose?" Dorothea looked from one to the other.

"Don't be silly. You telegraphed you were going to marry. It's absurd: you're too young, but who is it?"

"Why, that was Rebecca!" cried Dorothea, laughing and blushing.

"Bless my soul, how very dreadful!" exclaimed uncle Tony, spilling a great splash of hot tea on aunt Mary's dress.

"But it's broken off. Nothing could persuade her to stay after the earthquake. Not even her cook!"

"Well, I'm glad to have her back," gasped uncle Tony, "and the man, whoever he is, may thank Providence for having got up that earthquake!"

Dorothea looked from one to the other. "But I—I'm afraid I am going to marry, dears," she stammered, blushing. "At least, I have been asked to do so, and——"

"More have been asked than have accepted," cut in aunt Mary, like a knife. "Every woman has always a right to say 'no'—Heaven be praised!"

"'Heaven be praised,' indeed!" retorted uncle Tony.

"Hush! Hush!" interposed the gentle voice of aunt Mary. "Dorothea—tell us, darling—is it Egon von Roden?"

"Why, aunt Mary, how did you guess?"

"Guess, indeed: it's a shot!" cried Emma. "She's no earthly reason for saying it."

Dorothea took aunt Mary's fragile fingers in her own and kissed them.

"I only hope he is worthy of you," said aunt Mary.

"He would find it a difficult task to be that," cried Tony, very hot and flurried.

"But all women cannot remain old maids on that account," said Emma, complacently nodding her head; "in fact, but few women deserve to be old maids."

"An ambiguous sentence," remarked Tony, grinning in her face.

"Not to persons of sense, dear Antony. Now, Dorothea, tell us frankly: do you really want to marry this lad?"

"I believe he is good and honest, and I—I think he is very nice indeed," whispered Dorothea.

"God grant that he make you happy, my dearest!" sighed Mary, and her far-away look settled wistfully on the indifferent hotel cat, who lay purring by the hearth.

Uncle Tony struck his fist on the tea-table, causing the cups to jump up with a great rattle of spoons. He was discovered to be in a state of suppressed indignation: he looked more than ever like a distant cousin of Louis XVI.

"A German!" he gasped, in the clash of the tea-things.

"What did you say?" queried Mary.

"I—I asked for another cup^o of tea," answered uncle

Tony quickly. "Oh, he'll make Dorothea happy," he added with freshly rising wrath. "Any fool can take in any woman, never fear!"

"Indeed, is that *your* opinion?" cried Emma, catching fire. "I should have said: Can a man make a woman happy? He is only a man, only a poor, weak, human man."

Dorothea laughed. "Rira bien qui rira le dernier," retorted her aunt Emma. A heavier shadow than anyone there had dreamed of sank black behind the lightly spoken words, and spread across the sudden silence of the hearth. Only the hotel cat purred on steadily, for the still, dull glow of the ashes was pleasant, and the wanderers of life's grim comedy are but passing shades to a hotel cat. Nor has she ever been told—God bless her easy purring!—that there's nowhere a flame soars brightly, but somebody pays the bill.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

DOROTHEA had come alone to Paris with her two attendant maids. No doctor would undertake the responsibility of moving General von Roden so far north at this early season of the year. Ultimately, therefore, Lugano was selected as the most advisable intermediate station, and thither the whole family departed as soon as it became feasible to push along the railroad to Genoa.

A couple of days must however elapse, before the journey seemed practicable. During that period the city, in its hideous confusion, remained a place to avoid. The population camped out in the streets, amidst all signs of widespread distress: the wealthier lived in tents, under awnings, in landaus, scattered across the public gardens, along the esplanade. The poor bundled together anyhow, with their bedding and numerous progeny. The children played. And terrible human creatures that had suddenly arisen into the sunlight, none knew whence, prowled amongst the more isolated ruins, snarling for prey.

On the night after that of Dorothea's departure the rather disconcerted Colonel invited Egon von Roden to dine with him at a restaurant. "I dare say they can give us some sort of a dinner," he said.

"I don't care what I eat," answered Egon.

Colonel Sandring glanced at his companion and smiled. "To me," he said, "that looks the extreme of greediness. Only youth can be as greedy as that. Shall we turn down the Rue Maccarani?" His smile softened down into a sigh. "I remember," he continued, "when I was quite a little boy, I used to kiss my nurse-maid, oh, devotedly! I feel sure that she was very plain. Ah well! I used to

eat large quantities of a beastly stuff called toffy. Are you acquainted with toffy, von Roden?"

"No."

"'Tis a pity," said the Colonel, with the faintest touch of persiflage; "you are so young, you might still like it. Nothing on earth tastes so delicious as the sweet another man has just told you he can no longer digest."

Egon dimly realised that Colonel Sandring was drawing comparisons between their love-affairs, with inward laughter, and perhaps some faint regret. So he hastily changed the subject, back to the inevitable earthquake. "He lacks originality," thought the Colonel; but aloud that careless observer of his brethren only said: "I shall stay; we are all staying on at Monte Carlo. The rooms were never so cool, nor the tables so pleasantly empty. And lately I have won a—" he checked himself—"a pot of money."

"So much the better," answered Egon heartily; "winning must be so much pleasanter than losing. And, besides, one rejoices to hear of every louis that is snatched from the princely blackguards who own the place!"

"How very young these young Germans are!" thought the Colonel, mildly interested in this new amusement of studying your son-in-law. "I once knew an old lady," he remarked, "who possessed half a dozen shares in the Bank at Monte Carlo: she never staked more than her surplus dividends. She said it felt like losing to yourself and winning from your neighbours."

"Were you ever in an earthquake before?" answered Egon.

The Colonel sighed more heavily, but, "executing" himself with the easy good grace which was his by nature, he consented to discourse of earthquakes only, of variously experienced upheavals in the shakiest corners of the globe.

"Don't you care what sort of liquor you drink either?" he mildly inquired, as they took their places at a little table.

"Yes, I like my wine to be good."

"Bravo. I suppose you are aware that poor dear Dorothea is a teetotaller?"

Egon frowned. "I was not," he answered shortly. Sandring adjusted his eye-glass with a slight assumption of inspecting his fresh-faced young *vis-à-vis*. "Well, of course, you hardly know her," he declared. "That's right. Nothing astonishes me so much as the manifest rule of Nature,

that the happiest marriages are made from couples who knew each other least before they joined. Try this ketchup. Adam and Eve are a case in point."

"Were they specially happy?"

"So devoted that Adam ruined himself, rather than decline the dessert Eve had got for him. Adam detested apples."

"How do you infer that?" inquired Egon with sudden interest.

"Every grown-up man does. The few exceptions are influenced by boyish recollections of orchards and escapades. Adam could not have had those."

"So you think he ruined himself, rather than be rude to his wife?"

"Pardon me, rather than be rude to a woman, to the woman he loved—well, we have gone on doing that ever since. Has it occurred to you, Roden, that the first husband on this earth assumed a virtue, though he had it not—couldn't have it—I allude to conjugal fidelity? It would have been of absorbing interest to know what the first couple of us all would have done—but that chance is lost for ever."

Egon laughed, yet with annoyance. "I hear subscriptions are coming in very freely," he said. "Baron Maurice Rialto——"

"Let us talk of gentlemen," interrupted the Colonel quickly; "the mention of a Rialto at dinner sours the wine. Surely, as a German noble you agree with me there? You Germans have not yet learnt to eat gold-dirt, and call it"—he put on a Jewish accent—"manna."

"Oh, of course I loathe money," answered Egon lightly. The Colonel's smile now became a grin; he consented to talk of the earthquake till the two men had settled down over their coffee, on a balcony, by the crash, in the dark, across shingle, of the ever-sounding sea.

"You ought to be very grateful to me, you lucky young dog," said the Colonel. "That is good cognac, but it isn't—as the label says—'65."

The young man sat watching the glow of his big cigar and reflecting upon his happiness.

"After all, it is to me you owe the pleasure of Dorothea's acquaintance. I should never have introduced her to you, had I had an idea you were going to take her away from me." Sandring paused, reflecting on possibilities.

"She is a dear girl," he said heartily. "By George, you are a lucky dog."

"I am glad she is out of all danger," answered Egon. "The earthquake——"

"And, however a man may loathe money, it remains a desirable thing."

"When I said that I loathed money," began Egon uncomfortably, "I didn't mean the possession of it as such—please don't think me a fool. I meant what you had just been alluding to—money as a social status, as a caste, the all-pardonable crime—la haute finance, the Rialtos, South Africa! The Commerzienrath! You English are director—you have not got the Commerzienrath—as soon as a man has made a couple of millions, you recognise in him your master, and immediately you call him 'my lord.'"

"You are quite right, my dear Roden: still, I congratulate you on a future both well-born and wealthy," said the Colonel coolly, for he deemed the young man's remarks in bad taste.

Egon dropped the cigar from his lips and caught it with an exclamation of distress. "I'm so sorry," he cried; "I thought you knew. I'm a poor man. We shall hardly be able to marry just yet."

Colonel Sandring was no longer of the age that is astonished. He was only of the age that is annoyed. "Do you mean to say," he asked in a queer voice, "that you are unaware of my daughter's fortune?"

"I know—little of your private affairs," replied Egon, who did not believe in "the system."

"My private affairs are uninteresting, even to me. But my daughter's concern her future husband even more"—a faint sigh—"than her father."

"Of hers I know nothing at all."

"Do you mean to say"—the Colonel turned full on his son-in-law *in spe*—"that I am the first to inform you of Dorothea's position as an heiress with a great landed property in Holland and five thousand a year of her own?"

Egon von Roden sat quite still, staring into the blackness of the slow-thundering sea.

"In Holland?" he said at last.

"Yes: her mother was a Dutchwoman. Really, nothing seems more amazing to the philosopher than, the way in which we all, men and women, marry we don't know whom and we don't know what. I suppose love is a

providential dispensation. We are all more or less in the position of the bridegroom who had to be brought to the altar drunk. We shouldn't venture sober, certainly the women wouldn't, poor things! My wife was a Baroness van Brodryck: Dorothea is a lady of the manor in her mother's right."

"A Baroness van Brodryck," echoed Egon; "I believe I have heard the name." There rang in his voice such unmistakable satisfaction, that Sandring burst out laughing.

"You care more about that than about the fortune," he said. "How German you are, Roden! Thank your stars that I'm not a pig-headed insular Colonel Smythe! Look here, I like you, somehow, for not knowing about the money. So you thought you were marrying the child of a poor adventurer, who gambles at Monte Carlo? D——! so you are."

"A man always likes to think his wife's mother was a gentlewoman," answered Egon stiffly. "Dorothea does not care to speak of her dead parent. Well, it is time I was going back to the Villa; my uncle has exchanged Monte Carlo for Cimiez."

"Stay a minute!", Sandring laid his hand on the other's sleeve. "There is something I especially wished to speak about. You are going off to Lugano—Dorothea had made an arrangement with me—she is a—how shall I say?—pecuniary partner in the great undertaking which absorbs all my energies at this moment—perhaps you might write to her, now that you know of all this money—I do not wish to press any obligations you may have incurred towards me—but, really—well, this is a most important turning-point in my career—Dorothea must lend me another thousand pounds, and I shall never be in need of money again." The Colonel gasped.

"I can't write to Dorothea about money," answered Egon, in the shadow of a pillar, against the wall.

"Well, no, hardly, unless it were to commend to her a share in my success. But—I don't like to use the word 'obligation': let us say service—if you owe me any service, after all, as Dorothea's accepted husband, you can do these things for her. Your credit is nearly as good as hers: Levysohn will see that. I wish you would do me the slight favour of putting your name to a bill—a loan, of course—to-morrow morning, and then there need be no more talk of any debt from you to me." He tried to look

into the German's face, a little anxiously, for he was beginning to fight shy, in his good nature, of this young man's considerate silences. He could appreciate—he knew the feeling—all dislike of causing pain.

"You put me in a terrible position," said Egon at last. "I should be only too pleased to do anything you might wish—"

"That's right."

"But—don't you see?—the money I should eventually have to meet such a bill with, would be Dorothea's."

"There is no danger of that," replied the Colonel coolly, flinging a match over the balustrade; "I shall make a fortune, I tell you, in a week or two."

Egon did not answer.

"Well?"

"I'm so sorry!" burst out the young man. "I wish you would have let me go in silence! I—you compel me to speak, Colonel Sandring. I do not believe in success at the tables, and I think such success were a crime."

Colonel Sandring rose at once. "You take a load off my heart," he said. "I had grave doubts whether any man could be good enough for Dorothea. You have reassured me. You are good enough—quite good enough—even for her." He walked to the other end of the balcony, and called for a waiter. "The bill!" he said. Then he came back and held out his hand. "Good-night and good-bye. I hope Lugano will suit the General. The funicular railway will amuse you. And there will always be the earthquake for you to talk about. It is an interesting experience, an earthquake, like marriage. Nothing upsets one's preconceived ideas of stability so much. But you are a good young man; your head is screwed straight on your shoulders. I am heartily glad you are going to marry Dorothea. Good-bye!"

"Colonel Sandring, I have offended you; you are laughing at me," answered Egon. "I wish you could see how much, in my heart—if you will permit me to say so—I like you, how anxious I am to gain your good will. I am a young fellow, and I don't pretend to be particularly clever, but I love Dorothea. I'm not worthy of her; you must help me to—to make her as happy as we can."

Sandring squeezed the hand of his future son-in-law. Tears stood in the gallant Colonel's eyes. Presently he turned to the approaching waiter. "You should give better cognac than that at the price," he said.

CHAPTER II.

A COUPLE of days after the Rodens, Dorothea arrived at Lugano with her two aunts and uncle Tony. Mademoiselle Aurélie was in attendance, Rebecca having resolutely refused to take another step southwards—"to the earthquake," she called it. The aunts had advocated the immediate dismissal of Mademoiselle Bompard, but uncle Tony had deprecated this step: he felt as if the careful, smart little maid might form a protection for Dorothea in the great world to which her fate now tended. And the girl herself bowed unwilling obedience to her father's parting warning: "Keep that maid; you will find that you need her." "Dorothea," the Colonel had recently written—she found his letter at the Poste Restante of Lugano—"I believe you are going to marry a very good man. But, my dear, trust an old philosopher, who has seen men and cities: do not love him for his goodness, as I dare say you are apt to do. It doesn't answer: no human man's character can bear the strain. Love him for himself, as he is, with his faults. And find them out, the sooner the better. Before marriage, if possible. Every other love comes a crash."

"No, I love him for his goodness," said Dorothea, looking out upon the solemn sweetness of the Swiss-Italian lake. She was sitting on a little height in the climbing hotel garden, under a particoloured glory of Washington camellias in full bloom. All around her spread, as a blood-marble pavement, the white and crimson ruins of equal splendours overhead. In the calm evening sunshine she sat thoughtful, watching the great shadows sloping across the granite of the farther shore. Peace lay about her, after the storm of the preceding weeks—the peace of the old surroundings in heart and tranquil life-scene. Very different from the drunken blaze of the Riviera.

Upon her pure face sank reflected the simple calm of lake and sky. At least, to it seemed to Egon Roden, coming up the path with uncertain step.

"You ought not to tire your foot," she said anxiously.

He bit his lips, that she should recall his infirmity. He hated it; spite of all his bravery, he hated it, since his engagement, with quite a new hate.

"I had no right to ask you to marry me," he said abruptly, standing beside her.

"You have no right to say that," she answered quickly, "having asked me. Never any right to say that." Her cheek flushed. A great crimson blossom, white-seamed, fell heavily, from above, upon her knees. She held it out to him, laughing. "Thus," she said, "am I fallen, a dead weight, into your lap."

He took the flower and kissed it, kissed the finger-tips which held it, imprisoning them in his own. "Dorothea," he said very earnestly, "I want you to believe that I had not the slightest idea you were rich."

"Does it matter?" she answered, with a touch of scorn.

"I think it does. I have troubled about it, very greatly."

She looked up at him with eyes whose expression he could not fathom, half laughing, half sad. "I find it so difficult to understand all this talk about money. Of course I know it is very important. But at Brodryck there was always enough and never too much. It was not—how shall I say?—a subject of conversation. Uncle Tony use to tease me about 'business,' but that was different. Egon, I hope you like dear old uncle Tony."

"Very much indeed," said Egon, who had barely seen the old gentleman as yet.

"And aunt Emma—you will like aunt Emma. She is a pearl set in a—set in a——"

"Closed oyster," continued Egon readily, for aunt Emma had received him with a snap. "Yes, I feel sure I shall like aunt Emma."

"I do not ask you to like aunt Mary: you could not help yourself." She rose. "I promised to go up the Salvatore with uncle Tony. He said he wanted a talk with me." She faintly shrugged her shoulders. "Business, I suppose." His face clouded over at the words. "My father may possibly be mistaken," she said soothingly; "I don't think anyone except uncle Tony really knows anything about my affairs."

"The whole thing is idiotic," he replied bitterly, kicking a dead camellia across the path. "People would laugh at me if I said I wanted you to be poor. I laugh at myself."

Yet, I know how it will be. These relations of yours will say I have asked you for your money—I have practised on your innocence, your inexperience. I know the prejudice there is, besides, about poor Germans proposing to Dutch heiresses. I could have faced these simple aunts and that canny old gentleman much more happily a day or two ago, Dorothea. Do you know what Miss Emma said to me at the station?—"You have possessed yourself of a treasure, monsieur," she said, 'a treasure in every sense.'"

Dorothea bit her tongue, perhaps wishing it was aunt Emma's. "Well?" she said, bravely seeking his gaze. "Well? You are not flattering to me, mein Herr Egon?"

"So be it. If she, and your father, and everybody, see in you only the treasure that I seized at on the night of the earthquake, I shall be well content. But the world is too coarse for that. I have seen a man buy a Bible for sixpence, and say it was too much."

She stood still by the hotel door. "I love you for your goodness," she said, with words that sounded to her like an echo, "for your goodness. Uncle Tony is waiting in the hall."

"It is not that," he cried passionately. "Only, Dorothea, Dorothea: we know each other so little: we met in yonder disgusting atmosphere of Monte Carlo! I want you to believe always, once for all, that I loved you, whatever other people may tell you, for yourself, for yourself alone!"

"I am vain enough to believe it," she answered gravely.

"Thank you. I shall never, now, do you the insult of alluding to the subject again." He stood looking at her for a moment, calmly, but a great tenderness swelled across his eyes.

"Uncle Tony, I am sure I am in time," said Dorothea.

"My dear, it is quite possible. You are bound to be in *some* time, Swiss, French, or Italian. There isn't any particular time to be in, in this part of the world. I prefer the church clock at Brodryck."

"Which is always wrong."

"Well, yes, but there is method in its wrongness, the wrongness of all village clocks. Ten minutes too fast on Sundays, and ten minutes too slow all the rest of the week. There, at least, I know what to go by. Well, Dorothea, I hope you continue to like your German, Sprechen Sie Deutsch?"

"You are all against him," said Dorothea piteously. They were hurrying along the quay: the steel-blue water quivered beside them. The truth of the remark struck unwilling uncle Tony so forcibly, that he protested with all the vehemence at his command. All nationalities on earth, of course, without a single exception, cordially detest one another. Only the travelled classes—the travelled of the mind—can endure each other's virtues and faults. Uncle Tony had never travelled beyond himself. He disliked Germans, whose language he could not speak, and whom he conceived to be fortune-hunters all. He was furious with the result of his poor little plan for showing Dorothea a bit of the world outside Brodryck: he was disgusted at the girl, for thus abjectly tumbling into the very first trap that had been cast across her path. "Dorothea must please herself," said aunt Mary a little sadly. Her niece had told her all the tale of Pini, all except the Colonel's gambling habits and his shame. "I have constantly had your last words in my thoughts," said Dorothea, "the words you spoke to me in the upper room at Brodryck, aunt Mary. God put them on your lips before I left." The old lady lifted her hands to heaven. "Ah, my dear, we never make other people's mistakes," she sighed; "we only make our own." "*Quos perjury vult Deus, previous dementicat!*" declared aunt Emma. That was all the Latin she could speak, but she could frequently speak it. Such is the world that the quotation often comes pat: it has the advantage of rendering the Almighty Love responsible for all our folly and all our misfortunes. Aunt Emma had been watching the lovers under a palm-tree: she closed the window with a bang.

When Dorothea had been up the funicular railway with uncle Tony and admired the view from Monte Salvatore, and criticised the approaching sunset and the weather chances for the morrow, and had furthermore endured, though she did not share it, the home-staying old gentleman's extreme nervousness about the descent in the cars, she could stand the strain no longer. As they were rapidly slipping downwards and uncle Tony's red face hung craning over the clear abyss below, she suddenly burst out: "You all do him the greatest injustice! If I am rich, he is sorry enough for it. Only the other moment he was telling me, how he wished that I was poor!"

Uncle Tony extracted an agitated countenance from the

iron network through which he had been unnecessarily squeezing it. "Really, only fools want to travel and see things," he answered. "Ah, my dear, did your German actually say that?"

"I wish you would not call him my German," objected Dorothea pettishly.

"My dear, I heartily wish he was somebody else's. Well, well, we must make the best of a bad business. And to think that there are so many young men in Holland!" Uncle Tony again strove to gaze right away down into horrible depths. He chuckled to himself, however, as he sat blinking distractedly. "Well, well," he mumbled; "well, well, so he actually told her that he wished she was poor." He was very excitable all through dinner: the aunts stared at each other, in dismay. The ascent, he declared, had upset his equilibrium. People oughtn't to travel. Old people, especially, were better at home.

"If you mean that for me," remarked Emma, "I may tell you that I am thoroughly enjoying my trip. I like this hotel. It is full of newly-married couples. I watch them. I have observed two tiffs already, and one make-up."

"I am going for a smoke with von Roden," replied Tony. "Dorothea looks tired. Dorothea, you had better get to bed." He carried Egon off with him to a restaurant by the water-side, where a second-rate music-hall performance was frequently given of nights.

"I appreciate this sort of thing!" confessed the old gentleman, when he had listened to, and heartily applauded, a couple of ultra-sentimental ditties. "I am not *blasé*, you see, like you young men that have been everywhere. I don't get this sort of entertainment at Brodryck, and I haven't been abroad since I was forty!" He laughed heartily, the next moment, over a comic performer, whose humour consisted in blowing a baby's nose. He was redder in the face than ever, purple, as he stamped his feet and choked; and, the liqueurs being finished, he demanded beer. Egon von Roden, who was quite happy over the music-hall programme and the old gentleman's delight in it, began to feel vaguely alarmed. Was uncle Tony always so nervous, so exceedingly excited? Did he always knock his stick on the table and applaud with such excessive intensity?—above all, was it a habit of his to sit chuckling, and staring at his companion and drinking beer? "I am enjoying myself, I am thoroughly enjoying myself," said uncle Tony,

very loud. A couple of girls at a neighbouring table looked round and giggled. "I feel quite young again to-night," cried Tony; "my dear von Roden, have another glass of beer! When I was at the university, young men weren't afraid of a bottle or two—of anything. This beer is a great deal stronger than what I drink at home." He got even more excited as the entertainment progressed. "Bravo!" he cried, as he watched some athletes, balancing hundredweights. "Now comes the tug of war!" And he blinked, with that curious stare of his, at Egon.

"Is the light trying to your eyes? Shall we sit farther back, in the shade, on the terrace?" suggested Egon, pleased with his own diplomacy.

"The very thing I was going to propose!" exclaimed the exuberant old gentleman. They moved to a seat, outside the half-open glass screen, against some big plants, in the dark. On their way thither uncle Tony told a waiter to bring champagne. "Don't be alarmed," he said, as they settled down in their secluded corner; "nobody will note us here, and after that heavy beer, a glass of something lighter will do us all the good in the world before we turn in for the night." Egon could not object; he felt sure of his own unwilling powers, but he doubted the old man's.

"You are a very lucky fellow!" said uncle Tony abruptly. Egon Roden frowned: of course he was a lucky fellow. He wondered whether he was going to be congratulated again, as by Colonel Sandring, upon Dorothea's wealth.

The words of an English song came shrilling out to them:

"And this is what I s-y-y,
I know the time of d-y-y,
You needn't come a-courtin' me,
Unless you're goin' to p-y-y!"

"A lucky fellow, indeed!" cried uncle Tony, his whole face twitching, his knees trembling, his manner stranger than ever. "Dorothea's the most charming creature that ever walked God's earth!"

Suddenly Egon felt as if he could have embraced uncle Tony.

"You think so, surely!" persisted Tony testily.

"Why, of course—don't I love her?" answered Egon, surprised.

"You'd think so under all circumstances!" continued

Tony, wagging his head, and pouring out the champagne. He drank off quite a bumper at a gulp.

"There's only one pity," he said very loud: then his voice died away to a squeaky whisper: "She hasn't got as much money as people think—as people think."

"So you needn't come a-courtin' me, unless you're goin' to p—y—y!" Torrents of applause, in which uncle Tony joined.

"In fact——" Uncle Tony clutched at Egon's arm and poured the words into his ear: "Losses—you understand—mortgages—bad debts—agricultural depression—unfortunate investments! What are we?" Uncle Tony put both hands on the German's shoulders and gazed into his eyes. "I mean financially speaking! Here to-day: gone to-morrow—phew!" Uncle Tony blew a breath into emptiness, and refilled Egon's glass.

"So she is quite poor," said Egon.

"She is certainly what a man like you would call 'poor.' Never mind, love is a lovely thing, young sir. If I had ever loved, which I haven't, I shouldn't have minded if my love had money or hadn't, I should not have reverted to the subject at all! It would not have occurred to me!" cried uncle Tony.

Egon von Roden sat very still. Like most truly proud men—but pride is so rare a quality!—he was shy, and could not now say what he wanted to.

"It is chilly here," exclaimed uncle Tony with all the briskness of sudden discovery. Having uttered his message, delivered himself of the load on his heart, he took no further note of the champagne-bottle, but rose to his feet with a gentle obliquity of motion, and declared his intention to return.

"Stay and enjoy yourself," he said. "The singing is excellent. How funny that fellow is with his flapping hands? Good-night."

"Let me walk to the hotel with you! I don't care for the singing."

"No thank you," replied uncle Tony stiffly, and marched off to his bed and chortled himself asleep.

When he woke up in the morning, after heavy dreams, he sat up and smiled to his Bourbon face in the glass. The face was not as bright as usual, a little yellow about the eyes. He reflected that he had managed a ticklish business most excellently well: he put out his tongue and shook his

head. "I *had* to work up my courage," he said to his reproachful image. "In fact, I was in the very devil of a funk." Then he lay back, dizzy, on his pillows and dozed till a knock at the door introduced, not the waiter with breakfast, but Egon von Roden.

"They said you were not well, so I came up to inquire," remarked Egon.

"Pooh, I'm well enough," was the not very gracious reply. "This foreign cuisine disagrees with me."

"Dorothea and I are going out, this afternoon, on the lake."

"Humph! Well, Herr von Roden?"

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

"As fond of Dorothea as ever?"

"Fonder."

Uncle Tony sat up. "Do you mean to say you are glad she is poor?"

"If you put it like that, no. I'm not glad she is poor, but, somehow, I was sorry she was rich."

"But that doesn't make sense!" cried uncle Tony.

"I suppose not: however, that's all the sense I can make out of it. And I'd much rather discuss my dear future wife than her prospects—uncle Tony."

"You're not bound to marry her yet," said uncle Tony sulkily. "Slip through the Gothard by the ten o'clock express. I'll manage the rest."

Egon's face turned white. "What, in Heaven's name, do you mean?" he cried. "Dorothea has never told you to speak those words. I am sure that she—likes me, though I don't deserve it. What, in God's name, do you mean?"

Uncle Tony sat staring intently at the young man beside him. "I'm an ass," he said suddenly. "I needn't have given myself a headache. I suppose people learn to blunder at Brodryck. Look here, I—how shall I put it?"—he fumbled at the bed-clothes—"I told you last night that Dorothea had lost some money. Well, so she has. She's lost a couple of hundred pounds that I invested in Louisianas; and she's lost another hundred on the lease of one of the farms. That's all I've ever lost in these twenty years—not another penny. I don't mind about the lease, you see; but the thought of the Louisianas is what people call a nail in my coffin. However," he added cheerily, "a coffin wants a lot of nails."

"I don't understand," said Egon earnestly. "I don't want

to know, uncle Tony, but I *should* like to understand. Why do you talk of these matters to me? You said last night that Dorothea was poor!"

"Well, so she is poor—certainly what your uncle would call so. She has but a paltry five thousand a year!" Uncle Tony lay back, smiling. He abhorred the prospect of Dorothea's disappearance into foreign countries, but he could not, for the life of him, help liking this young man he had roundly abused in his soul. In his rustic blending of ingenuity and ingenuousness he thought things had almost come right.

"I don't understand. I don't understand at all," said Egon.

"Never mind: you needn't. I'm glad to find you don't. Let us say no more about it."

Egon had turned to look out of window, on the smiling landscape. He now suddenly faced round.

"You thought I had asked Dorothea, for the sake of her money. You wanted to find out."

Uncle Tony lay back, laughing. "Well, my dear boy, if so, the fault was yours. Why did you tell Dorothea you were sorry to hear of her wealth?"

"You thought I lied. You thought I was one of those Riviera adventurers." Egon Roden came towards the bedstead, his face set, his hands tight-clenched along his hips. "Great God, I should never have thought it possible that one man could so hurt another! I—I——" He fled from the room, and out into the open air.

Aunt Emma was sitting sunning herself near the hotel entrance. "Look!" she said. "Hist! Do you see that young couple there? They are compatriots of yours. They had made it up yesterday, but they have just quarrelled dreadfully about a fresh subject—walks! Hush! Listen for a minute: you will hear them!"

And, indeed, the man's voice came across to them from a garden-seat, in loud accents. "It is absolutely necessary for my constitution. My doctor insists upon a proper amount of exercise!"

"Yours is an improper amount!" rang the answer. "I refuse to be fagged to death, on my honeymoon! Go, then, walk with the red-haired Mees you admired on the boat!"

"Now I," said aunt Emma, folding her hands, "when I wish to repose myself, I repose myself. Antony, when he desires to march after rabbits, he marches. Go away,

Herr von Roden ; you disturb them. They guess that you understand."

Egon was most willing to comply: he wanted a talk with the Generalin, and went in search of her at her *pension*, a sheltered villa, between slopes.

The sitting-room was empty: he passed through it into his mother's bed-room; that also was deserted, but a couple of letters for him, just come by post, lay on the table. He broke them open: doubtless, she had laid them aside, intending to take them down to him.

Meanwhile the little Generalin ushered aunt Mary into the sitting-room. Aunt Mary was dressed in her very best silk, and her face was paler than ever.

"Yes, I am anxious to speak with you," said aunt Mary, "very, very anxious, indeed."

"Do not sit in the draught," replied the Generalin.

Aunt Mary, for answer, got up and closed the window—shut out the brightness and the hundred humming noises of the garden—as if inadvertently, she flung forward the curtain, and the little hotel room became very dark and still.

"Dorothea has no mother," said aunt Mary.

"I trust that she will find one in me," replied Frau von Roden.

Aunt Mary gulped down a swift impulse of resentment. "Thank you."

The quick sympathies of the little Generalin understood. "She has never, I should think, felt the loss of one," said the Generalin. "I owe you and your sister the treasure you are willing to share with my boy." She extended her hand: aunt Mary took it, held it, dropped it. "You make my task somewhat easier," said aunt Mary, shuddering. "It is a very dreadful task. I do not know how to begin."

Frau von Roden waited.

"A treasure, as you say. My only earthly treasure." Aunt Mary sank back, as far as she could, into the shade. "Her only guardian, as you say, am I. With more than a mother's responsibility. Colonel Sandring, in these matters, counts for nothing. Do not let me wrong him: no man would. The—the sacredness of a woman's life can only be safe-guarded by women."

When the silence was becoming painful, the Generalin said: "Quite true." The words seem to rouse all the protest in aunt Mary.

"Too true!" she cried. "And how many women—that should be watchers—lie asleep at the gates of the temple! Madam, I have a right to ask you—I!—is your son worthy of this virgin heart that he has stolen? Surely, you will answer me, oh surely!—'Do you come here to insult my son?' Nay, God knows such thought is far from me. I come with fear and trembling, and horror of myself and of you! And what, after all, avails me your answer?" She shrank away, as if she would hide in the solid wall behind her. "What does a mother know of the life of her son?"

Egon having finished his letters, and the *Bonner Zeitung*, and hearing voices, tried to go out by the bedroom door: but the Generalin had a habit of locking hotel doors. He paused, irresolute.

"Listen," continued aunt Mary quickly. "I had a friend, as a girl, whom I loved very dearly. She married, young, a man she by no means disliked. Her father made the match: she gave her hand and her heart, as girls will, pleased. I am sure the man loved her—like a man: that is to say, he wanted to marry her. Within a year of their marriage, complications became known to her—there was a child: it has died since. The shock came to her under peculiar circumstances: she was ailing: she died in giving birth to her baby."

The Generalin looked up: she knew that this baby was Dorothea. "Mothers," she spoke gravely, "as you say, know too little of the lives of their sons. But of this my eldest I know the heart. I would lay my own daughter's happiness in it and be glad."

But aunt Mary hid her white face in her trembling hands. "You are a mother," she stammered. "Life would be impossible to us women, if God had not blessed mothers with blindness. I have seen women, many women, mothers of grown sons, and their hearts were guileless as the doves—nay, silly, as the chickens! It is wrong for a woman, you say, to know. Nay, madam, it is wrong for her to ignore!"

She rose, suddenly, and cast down her hands: the tempered sunlight flushed her cheeks. "Think of me as you will," she cried. "What care I? My child's future is at stake! I, then, I venture to *know*. I venture to know, and to share, vigilance work, rescue work, work against infamous legislation! It is the natural work, as it seems, for us, the unloved old maids, the disappointed, with no

men to protect us, or impede ! It is we, then, in our loneliness, who must help each other, wise as serpents, against you, the guileless of our race ! I will know"—she stamped her foot—"whether my dear child's future—ay, her bodily health—is safe in the hands of this chance man she has picked up in the street !"

The Generalin, white to the lips, stood in the middle of the floor.

"I would gladly give my life for the child," said aunt Mary, with the calm of desperation, "and shall I not sacrifice what doubtless you would call my modesty ? My modesty, forsooth ! I am old : I have seen little of the world, but enough. I do not demand of a young man the purity of a maiden. But I demand, for my Dorothea, that this man shall not hurt her, when he folds her to his breast !"

The door opened, between the two rooms, and Egon stood in it.

The Generalin ran forward. "Egon !" she cried, "Egon !" She threw her arms round her son's neck ; and rested her small head against his stalwart shoulder. The whole room lay quiet. "Thank God, thou canst answer," she said.

The young man folded one arm around her waist, and turned gently to aunt Mary. "I have only heard your last words," he said. "These I can answer. For I can give you even more than you demand."

Aunt Mary sank back upon a couch and began crying piteously.

For a moment Egon stood gazing from one woman to the other, desirous to say something, afraid lest a word should give pain. Then he softly disengaged himself, as aunt Mary's weak sobs rose persistent, stepped forward, timidly kissed the poor hand that lay abandoned on the black silk gown, and stole from the room.

The Generalin remained, as he had left her, lost in silence and perplexity. Gradually she approached the couch on which the old lady lay weeping, and seated herself there, and waited. But all the flush of boldness had died away from aunt Mary's heart : she was deeply troubled, yet whether for sadness or gladness she could not have told. There was shame upon her, all a good woman's shame for a world that lieth in wickedness. She dared not to uplift her eyes to look upon the other's face.

The Generalin, after much hesitation, bent and kissed the old lady, but not as Egon had done. Kissed her gently on the brow. "Blessed are the pure in heart," she said firmly, "for they shall see God"—then she also stole from the room.

In her own bedchamber she took up an unfinished letter to her second son, Konrad. Her lips shook. She laid it down again and sat looking out of the window, for a long time, away into the pale blue sky. "It was Egon," she murmured. "Supposing it had been Konrad! Ah, Made-moiselle Mary, a mother knows many things that no one ever told her!"

It was here that Egon still found her, after the luncheon-bell had gone.

"My father is worse," he began quickly. "You have noticed it: I have noticed it—why, then, should we hide it from one another?"

"I thought you had not remarked anything," answered the Generalin. "Perhaps it is only the change. I do not think Gertrude has perceived it."

"But, mother, you and I—we have no secrets from one another."

"Egon, then let us have none. He wants you—perhaps it is only a sick man's fancy—he wants you, oh, so much! to be married before he—before he——"

"For Heaven's sake, don't put it like that!" exclaimed Egon. "He's not as bad as that, mother."

"Perhaps not. But you know, Egon, it is very important, under the circumstances, that you should marry immediately!"

"Yes, yes, I know," he answered, irritably. "Perhaps it is all the better. I am beginning to think that, if I stay on much longer with uncle Tony, I shall never be married at all."

"You do not like him?" asked the Generalin, with her hand on the door-knob.

"No, I cannot say I like him. But then, I am not going to marry him. Come, mother dearest, my father will be waiting lunch."

That afternoon, in the boat, Egon, resting on his oars, exclaimed suddenly to Dorothea: "For one minute we must talk business, please."

"You begin like uncle Tony," laughed the girl.

"But mine is, to me at least, very sweet business, very

sweet and very sad. Dorothea, my father is failing fast. And—he is very anxious for us to marry, whilst we still have him with us."

Immediately Dorothea was all sympathy. She thought the nearest relations were over-anxious. The General seemed so bright and cheerful—but Egon put her pretty comfortings aside.

"We—we cannot be married so very soon?" she stammered.

"I told you there was business connected with the matter," continued Egon, and resumed rowing very fast. "It is disgustingly stupid, and tragi-comic, like life. Dorothea, you know that my uncle, the present bearer of the title, and owner of all the estates, is unmarried. Doubtless your father has told you all about our entail?"

"No," replied Dorothea, "only that you had a curious family agreement, that lots must be cast between sons to see who should succeed."

"Yes, that is our 'Hausgesetz,' as we Germans call it. Had my father, the only brother, survived—but that does not look likely, alas!—he would of course have become Count Roden-Rheyna. Otherwise, lots must be cast between all who next follow in the same degree of relationship—my two brothers, for instance, and myself."

"Yes, I understand—it is very strange," said Dorothea.

"It is not a unique case: there is a good deal to be said for the idea of allowing God to choose directly between all equal brothers—or cousins. That, of course, is the old feudal idea, the God's Choice. But, see, there is one other, not unjust, prevision. The married brothers exclude the unmarried."

"I understand, then, by marrying you become the heir."

"As long as Konrad remains unmarried, yes. And, to prevent unseemly machinations no candidate may marry within a year after he has come into the direct degree of succession. There, that's enough of business. You understand?"

"Neither you, then, nor your brother, could marry within a year after your father's death?"

"Just so."

She dabbled her hands in the water, full of solemn thoughts.

"But—but if you were to marry now and—and lose him—you would be the only heir?"

"Yes, dearest, yes—as I said, until Konrad marries, which I hope my father will live to see him do."

"I like to understand things clearly. I must tell aunt Mary!"

"By all means tell aunt Mary. And uncle Tony too!"

"Egon, you promised me to like uncle Tony!"

"All right, dearest darling; 'Barkis is willing.'"

"Why Barcas? He was the father of Hannibal: I don't know the story."

"It's out of Dickens. Your education has been classical, Dolly. I thought everybody everywhere had read 'David Copperfield.'"

"Aunt Mary didn't like me to read many novels," said Dorothea humbly.

"I dare say she was right. Just look at that bit of shabby brown town on the mountain, the one with the ruined castle above! Doesn't it look, now the sun has got behind it, as if it were embossed, on a platter, in bronze. Like a bit of Benvenuto Cellini, by Jove!"

Dorothea, freshly cognisant of pitfalls, allowed Benvenuto Cellini to sink back, untouched, into the abyss of the unknown.

CHAPTER III.

A FEW weeks later, as soon as the necessary formalities could be complied with, Dorothea Sandring was married to Egon Roden in the little German chapel at Lugano. Everybody interested in the event was present. Excepting, of course, the humble friends at Brodryck and at Rheyna, some of whom perhaps cared more about the matter than a couple of important relations who figured, gold-laced, in the wedding procession.

"Nothing in this world ever happens as it ought to," declared aunt Emma crossly. How often had she and her sister not imagined Dorothea's marriage festivities at Brodryck! "And now," declared aunt Emma, "they must just sit down and marry her anywhere, in the middle of the road." "God forgive me," said aunt Emma, "but I can make head nor tail of these divine confusions. I like straight lines."

"God works in arabesques," replied aunt Mary.

Aunt Emma gave a little grunt. "Well, my dear, you know more about Him than I," she said humbly. She devoted herself, with much fussiness, to endless intricacies of trousseau and toilet—for aunt Emma was great upon dress. At home, in Brodryck, everybody—the parson's wife, the doctor's wife—always consulted her. She studied the illustrated catalogues which the big French emporia of everything periodically pour across the world. But she never ordered an article from these shops, because the people were presumably Papists.

In the busiest days of preparation, she suddenly realised the immense use, the undoubted authority, of Mademoiselle Aurélie Bompard. Mademoiselle Aurélie, unasked, stepped one morning into aunt Emma's chaos of fashion-books, selected and arranged before aunt Emma's hot cheeks and astonished eyes, threw a lot of cheap generalities into the waste paper basket, soothed the old lady with bits of

autobiographical precedent, and finally presented a well-ordered list of names and needs.

"But these addresses," said aunt Emma, with the paper spread before her, "are mostly, I fear, those of Catholic tradesmen. It is against our Protestant principles——"

"Mademoiselle is mistaken," said Aurélie demurely. "I am a Catholic, but I also have a weakness for principles! I have carefully chosen Huguenots. Not that it is difficult: all the best shops in Paris are in the hands of Huguenots and Jews."

"Indeed, I am heartily glad to hear it," said aunt Emma.

"Mademoiselle does not object, I understand, to Jews?" demanded the maid, with a touch of satire about the eyes.

"N—n—no," responded aunt Emma, and began quickly perusing the list.

"'Au petit St. Joseph!' " she read, and stopped.

"That is the old sign," declared Aurélie with volubility "—it is a very ancient house—before the new religion."

"The reformation!" corrected aunt Emma severely. "'Les Dames du St. Calvaire'—eh?—distressed gentlewomen, good."

"It is a Protestant convent," explained Aurélie, from sheer ignorance.

"What? There is no such thing," cried aunt Emma indignantly.

At this moment Dorothea entered the room, and Aurélie very nearly gave herself up for lost. "Which address does Mademoiselle point to?" she said readily; "Les Montagnes russes?—yes, they are Protestants, or, rather, Russians—the Russian religion, you know. I once lived with a Russian princess: she was not a Roman Catholic. She had gilded saints in the corners of her rooms and drank vodka."

"This!" said aunt Emma, slapping the "Dames du Calvaire." "This!"

"Ah, yes, that is Catholic," replied Aurélie innocently. "It is the only exception. For why? You can get no Protestant lace."

"True," interposed Dorothea; "with us also the Catholic provinces are those which produce it."

"It is like the Romish superstition itself, all odds and ends and patchwork!" cried aunt Emma.

"Blended in a beautiful design," exclaimed the indignant Aurélie, who was *dévoté*.

"Peace! if I only had time, what with all this trousseau business, I should convert you! It is a great pity you don't understand Dutch, Aurélie: you could greatly have benefited from intercourse with Rebecca. For a person in her station of life," continued Emma to Dorothea in Dutch, "Rebecca has a very satisfactory amount of religion. You cannot expect such persons to rise beyond the rudiments. Vinet and Monod are caviare to the crowd of Rebeccas."

"I must get to comprehend their gibberish," reflected the Frenchwoman. Aloud she said: "I have learnt always to understand the languages I lived amongst, with the exception of Russian and Chinese."

"Chinese?" cried both ladies.

"I lived a year with the 'Marquise' Ping, at the Embassy. Poor creature, her husband detested her, because her feet were a millimetre longer than those of his sister-in-law."

"In Christian countries they ought to forbid those feet!" cried aunt Emma.

"What would you have, Mademoiselle? They could no longer order them to grow."

"Well, I suppose we must have the lace," said aunt Emma quickly. "What? you have already the patterns? Oh, look, Dorothea, this is truly exquisite——" and soon aunt and niece were engrossed in these flimsy delights. Aurélie shrugged her shapely shoulders behind aunt Emma's back. "Is Mademoiselle aware," she suggested, "that Monsieur le Comte de Roden-Rheyna is arrived this morning?" The accents lingered with condescending appreciation over the name of the bridegroom's uncle. These countryfolks from savage lands—petite noblesse de campagne—were almost beneath the maid's notice—but Count Roden-Rheyna appeared a personage of sufficient importance even to her supercilious approval. His mother, the bridegroom's grandmother, had been a Princess Stolzenau-Gutelande—Altesse Sérénissime!

Certainly, Dorothea was aware that "the Head" had arrived an hour ago. Everybody had realised the fact. The Lord of Rheyna himself seemed fully conscious of it, as he lay stretched on a carmine velvet sofa, in the apartment reserved for him at the Hotel du Parc.

"Ouf!" he said to Egon, who stood before him "on duty." "Would you mind pulling off my boot—the left—unless you prefer calling my man? Yes, it is the gout

again. Very annoying. My doctor says I must choose between gruel and the gout. Slops every day, or the gout twice a year. 'Will the gout kill me?' I asked him. 'No,' says he. Well, the slops would."

"So you have not yet dismissed Cordillon?" queried Egon.

"No, indeed. Cordillon is a master of little savoury dishes, mint, parsley, all that sort of thing—*bouquet*. What said Solomon? Better a dinner of herbs than a stalled ox—didn't he? He was quite right. No one, at his age or mine, could digest beef *au naturel*."

"It was very good of you to come," said Egon.

"There you are right. It certainly was. But, my dear boy, I have done worse things, because I had to."

The nephew grinned.

"Of course it was a great nuisance having to travel back all the way from Berlin. But the journey to Berlin was inevitable, practically a royal command. Hand me that pocket-handkerchief! Thank you. Did you see my speech in the Herrenhaus?"

"Most certainly: I read it aloud to my father."

Count Roden-Rheyna made a face.

"The amiability of my relatives exceeds anything I had a right to expect. Well, I proved to these people that the agrarian interest must be protected within limits. Within limits: that was the point of my speech. It appears to have been very successful. His Majesty was pleased to confer upon it the highest commendation he has ever been known to bestow."

"What did he say?" demanded Egon, with a Prussian's eager devotion to his king.

"He said that he could hardly have put the matter more clearly himself. Ring for something to drink, I am worn out. Well, Egon, when I am gone—to Abraham's bosom, I mean—you will have to make agrarian speeches. Mark my words: times are changing: you will have to make them the other way round. That'll be just as easy, and quite as correct!" He yawned. "Pull down the blind!" he said. "Thanks."

"It is by no means sure that the duty will devolve upon me," replied Egon uncomfortably. He always winced at his uncle's frequent allusions to the succession.

To his disconcertment, that old gentleman sat up suddenly on the sofa, first stared him out of countenance, and then laughed till arrested by a cough.

"Egon, you are a deep one," gurgled the Count. "Do you know, I should never have looked for this sort of cunning in you: I thought you were simple, like your father. Accept my congratulations! All the same, I am a little disappointed in you. I admit that it is utterly irrational, but the very sneaky sympathy that made me feel at home with Konrad—I rather regret, somehow, to find it in you. I appreciate intrigue, but I thought you were different."

"I am quite unfit for intrigue," answered Egon. "I should make a mess of the simplest manoeuvre——"

"You take me for a blockhead," retorted Count Roden angrily. "Do you deem me to be blind? The first duty of a clever schemer, Egon, is to presume that people guess his schemes. And do you really imagine that I do not understand why, as soon as your father falls ailing, you find it convenient to marry?" He laughed again, rather bitterly.

"Konrad does not understand either," he added. "Of course not. Oh, no."

Egon stood staring, too astonished to speak.

"Look here," said his uncle, facing towards him. "You have a perfect right to act as you are doing. It is even very sensible of you to select a wife with a fortune, as you are able to secure one. I had always fancied, somehow, that you would behave like an idiot, and marry for love. Love only, I mean. Well, you are a far discreeter young man than I took you for. So much the better. Only don't talk rubbish about butter not melting in your mouth. You insult me by thinking me the simpleton I took you for." He struck his hand impatiently on a side table, and his face twitched, as he moved his foot.

"Your accident has brought you luck, as I always said it would. Being a civilian, you are able to marry when you like. Poor Konrad has not such licence. I must say I think you have stolen a march upon him."

"You must let me say, that I imagined I was proposing to a poor girl, who—whose position was unfortunate, and whom I loved. That I thought of nothing else. You will hardly doubt my word, uncle Karl, though you will find it difficult, I fear, to remember my explanation. I cannot help it. And nothing can rob me of Dorothea." Egon spoke with white calmness, checking the tremble in his tones.

Count Roden curiously eyed his nephew.

"The *naïveté* of yesterday," he said slowly, "tastes like tinned lobster. I have a choice, now, between a—will you permit me to say, between an ass and a fox? Thank you. I now prefer the fox? You play your cards well, Egon, but you are absurd about hiding your hand. I am frank. I tell you honestly, I shall give Konrad the earliest opportunity of marrying. I think that is only common fairness. I have written to him, that he may count upon me for the necessary funds. He must have a fair chance. And I do not intend to die for a long time. Besides, it is advisable that he should marry. He is too fond of love-making. He is not able to distinguish between a flirtation and an entanglement. That is the most fearful defect I can imagine in a man!" He looked so frightened that Egon shuddered too.

"I could understand your estimate of my conduct," said the young man boldly, "if the state of your health were as bad as—as——"

"My poor brother's? Well, it isn't. By no means. There you put your finger on the weak point in your whole scheme, Egon. You have thought it out well, my son. But Konrad will have plenty of time to marry, before you two brethren are called upon to draw lots over my grave." He made a grimace. "Still, *if* I were to fall from my horse, as my poor father did, you, Egon, within a few months' time, would inevitably be Count Roden-Rheyna."

"Well, I am the eldest!" cried Egon with a flash of temper.

"Since when has that mattered?" demanded Count Roden haughtily. "My father, as you know very well, was the younger son. Understand me, Egon, I deem it quite natural of you to leap into wedlock on the eve of your father's demise—only, only, somehow, I did not think that sort of computation would have entered into your head."

"It has not entered into my head," replied Egon, and he departed without the customary formal dismissal.

His uncle immediately called him back. "Your vehemence has not convinced me, my dear boy," said Count Roden. "Vehemence never convinces educated men."

"I cannot hope to convince you," answered Egon in the doorway. "Is there anything else I can do for you, uncle Karl?"

"Yes, certainly. Pull up the blind, please. Thank you. Remember this, Egon, for your future speeches, political and otherwise. To convince one of the common people,

you must shout your lies at him: to convince an educated man, you must smile them. As for trying to convince any one of a truth——" It was his turn to smile.

"Well?" said Egon.

"I don't know. I have never heard it done."

"My God!" cried Egon, and flung forward his lame foot, as if he were kicking something on the carpet.

"Is that the earldom of Rheyna?" asked his uncle, gazing, much amused, at the floor, in the direction of the invisible something. "You will tell me next, that you would prefer to remain plain Herr von Roden."

"No, I do not say that. Surely it is a painful subject, uncle Karl. I do not envy anybody. I am very happy, in spite of——"

"What?"

"My father's illness, and a lot of bothers," answered Egon stoutly.

"I understand that you do not envy *me*," said Count Roden, and cast a look at his own white hair in the glass.

"There is one thing of yours I shall ask for some day, all the same."

"D——, some day you will ask for all!"

"I shall ask for your groom, Hans Stormer, for a servant, I promised him to do so as soon as I settled down."

"You can have him at once. You know that his wife is dead?"

"Dead!"

"Egon, what a fool you are! No, really, I beg your pardon. But your tone and your look are ridiculous! She died a week ago, suddenly, after seven months of marriage. I remember your telling me he said he hated women—but, by Jove, it appears he loved *her*."

"Poor Hans!" said Egon.

"You can have him at once. Telegraph for him. I am very sorry for him also. I am sorry for every man who loves a woman more for herself than for *him*."

"He would hardly want to be present at a wedding!"

"Perhaps not. He need not be present." Count Roden yawned. "How changeable the sun is in these parts. Would you very much mind once more pulling down the blind? Thanks. I shall lunch with you all. Meanwhile, present my respects to your bride."

Egon found her amongst the laces, from which he extracted her, despite aunt Emma's appeals.

"Egon, what has happened?"

"Hans's wife is dead!"

She walked beside him in the hotel garden. "I am very sorry," she said.

"How can you be sorry? You don't know him. Oh, Dorothea, his wife is dead!" They sat down by a little fountain. Presently, to divert his thoughts, she began to speak of their preparations for the wedding.

But at that moment she hurt him, all unconsciously—illogically, for had he not denied her claim to share his sorrow? He answered abstractedly: his thoughts were with the man yonder, in the empty cottage, broken-hearted. His sullen look was fixed upon the little plashing fountain. So the water goes on falling, falling ever, the monotonous flow of human tears before the face of God.

"Shall we walk back?" suggested Dorothea at length. Doubtless, he had had some trouble with the terrible uncle, whose advent she dreaded. She was unable to fathom his affection for this servant, who had hardly been mentioned between them, the friend and companion of a youth she had not shared. Lovers, after all, are but yesterday acquaintances, that have nothing in common but a future which never comes true.

"I wanted to show you this," said Dorothea. She had brought a small case from her room into the little *salon*:

"My father sent it from Milan," she added. "He writes that he will come over for the day." She lifted the white chamois-leather lid of the case, and a magnificent diamond bracelet lay revealed in the sunlight.

They looked at each other. "It represents a small fortune," said Egon.

"He writes so kindly! He regrets that it isn't a necklace, he says."

Again they looked at each other. Little as they knew of their hearts—still less of their minds—they had never yet, in their brief engagement, more fully understood each other's thoughts. Each was considering, with vexation, that this jewel had been gained at the tables. Each was yearning to put it away, and never touch it again.

"It is very good of *your father*," said Egon at last. "You must write and thank him, in my name also, for sending you so splendid a present."

A grateful flush rose slightly about her temples. She closed down the lid with a snap, and stood looking out at

the mountains. "When you and I are married"—she said.

"Well?"

"We shall be very happy."

He laughed. "Are you quite sure of that?" he asked tenderly.

"Quite sure. I trust in your goodness. I know that, in all things, you will always be absolutely noble and upright and good."

He pressed her to his side. "Dearest, you are sweet and dear beyond words," he said, "but——"

"What, Egon?"

"That is hardly fair." Before either could utter another word, aunt Emma had entered the room,

"My young husband has not yet come in from his walk!" she cried triumphantly, "and his young wife is crying out her eyes in the garden. The idiot!"

"Poor thing!" said Egon and Dorothea, both at once.

"Poor thing, indeed!" mimicked aunt Emma. "Promise me, Dorothea, that you will never cry over *anything* Egon may do!"

"Except die!" exclaimed Egon.

Dorothea shuddered from head to foot.

"You might be original," grunted aunt Emma. "That was stolen from Louis Quatorze."

"A good husband," laughed Egon.

Dorothea turned quickly. "For Heaven's sake let us talk of something else," she said.

On the very morning of the wedding, as Dorothea stood waiting in her bridal garments, Colonel Sandring made his appearance. His frock-coat was perfect; his gardenia without a spot. He had not been alone with his daughter since the morning of the earthquake, and reminiscences of that morning arose in the minds of both.

"I arrived at six o'clock, by the night train," said the Colonel calmly. "Yes, I am in admirable health, Dolly, but I did not feel quite equal to sentimental *tête-à-têtes* with those dear ladies, your aunts. Or to a business *tête-à-tête* with uncle Tony."

She showed him his bracelet upon her arm.

"I wish it had been a necklace," said the Colonel promptly. He would have said that, if awakened out of sleep.

"But I have another present for you," he added.

Dorothea tried not to look alarmed.

"Which perhaps you will like still better."

Dorothea tried harder.

"To-morrow I marry, at Milan, the lady you know as Madame de Barvielle."

Dorothea was silent.

"The Baroness Blanche de Barvielle de Fleuryse," continued the Colonel boldly. "Madame de Fleuryse."

"Well? I thought you would come and pat my head and say 'Good boy!'" cried the Colonel. Could a flutter disturb the breast that had never known fear?

"I am very glad," said Dorothea slowly.

"You hardly look it."

"Yes, I am very glad," said Dorothea, and the slow words came gradually faster, as they do when we are eagerly convincing ourselves while we speak. "It is right. It is good. I am glad, father. I should like to congratulate Madame de — Fleuryse."

"Congratulate me first," laughed the Colonel. "Perhaps that had better suffice. The lady will be in church, in a dark corner where no one will observe her; she was anxious to see you made happy for ever." The Colonel sighed.

"Father," said Dorothea, blushing crimson, "we have spoken of money sometimes. I come of age to-day by my marriage. Perhaps we could make some arrangement, if you were in need of money?"

"You dear girl!" The Colonel ran forward with out-stretched arms, but checked himself in front of this cloud of gauze and lace. "I have plenty of money just now," he said, "but you are the dearest girl in all the world."

"I thought, perhaps, if you preferred a larger fixed income——" continued Dorothea timidly. "Isn't a thousand a year very little for married people? I am sure Egon would be glad——"

"Stop!" interrupted Sandring, haughtily. "Let us speak the plain truth, Dolly. I cannot accept charity, though I should have once liked a loan, from your husband. Besides, it would be useless. You must leave me to my roving instincts, dear. I couldn't settle down in a suburban villa—say Tooting or Denmark Hill! You don't understand—but I understand you perfectly. It's no

use, dear. I must have my changes of scene, and my amusements. I must gamble——"

Such a look of horror came into Dorothea's eyes!

"——gambol about the fields, like a naughty, elderly kid," continued the Colonel adroitly. "You can't make a purring, milk-and-water cat out of a frisky young goat."

The entrance of the bridegroom prevented further reply. "What! Not in uniform? Not even your decorations!" cried the astonished German.

"Pooh! No. I dislike all that sort of thing."

"Still, with these military relations of ours, it might have been advisable," said Egon reflectively. "A uniform always looks well,"—and his glance sank down his own black sleeve.

"My luggage is at the station; I'll bedizen myself, if you like," suggested the good-natured Colonel. "I can do it, I suppose, if I look sharp."

"Stay one minute!" interposed Dorothea. "Egon, my father—I am sure you will be very glad to hear it—has just announced to me his marriage with Madame de Barvielle de Fleuryse!"

Egon endeavoured to look more gratification than he found it quite possible to express.

"Madame is here. She will be present in church. Father, I hope"—with a sudden burst of fervour—"we shall hold a reception in the vestry. You must bring her there to congratulate me."

"No, no, that is not necessary," began the Colonel hurriedly. Egon stood aside, a slight frown between his eyes. But the Colonel did not look in his direction.

"Father, I want you very especially to do it. Don't you see, it will get over a lot of bother for you at once!" Dorothea eagerly pressed the point. She was not to be outdone in generosity. Present for present upon these wedding days!

"She believes he is marrying chiefly for her sake," reflected Egon. "And she doesn't really understand anything about Blanche de Fleuryse, excepting that she thinks the couple have delayed—most improperly—the date of the ceremony!"

"Nobody ever says 'no' to a bride," persisted Dorothea.

The Colonel smiled awkwardly.

She turned to Egon. "Certainly not the bridegroom!" she exclaimed. "Come, Egon, help me to convince him!"

What could the bridegroom do? "Yes, yes," he said. "Do as Dorothea advises, Colonel!"

So it came about that this great thing happened in the vestry, amongst all the flowers and the uniforms, the light dresses, the laughter and the tears. Dorothea was standing with her husband in the place of honour; the troubled aunts were near her; she was speaking with Egon's magnificent, stupid cousin, the Duke of Stolzenau-Gutelande, who stammers, as everyone knows, and cannot find his words—a brilliant assemblage was gathered around them, small, of course, but just the people one would expect to find here.

Then Colonel Sandring, who had disappeared for a moment, came forward. He wore a handsome military uniform; his breast was constellated with orders. And the Baroness Blanche de Fleuryse, in cream-coloured velvet, rested her finger-tips on the curve of his sleeve.

"Ah, how do you do, Baroness?" exclaimed Dorothea. "Duke, this is Madame de Fleuryse, who is about to marry my father?"

The words fell like a bomb in a circle of statues. Nobody spoke. Yet the statues, one felt, were living statues, all eyes and ears, in the sudden hush.

"Very hap—pap—pappy," said the calf-faced Duke.

Madame de Fleuryse, as usual, was mistress of the situation in which she found herself. "I see your Highness does not remember me," she spoke; "we have met in Paris at the house of my cousin, the Count di Casa Profonda!"

"The Cow—cow—cut—cut—cut—," said the Duke.

Dorothea looked around her, nervous but triumphant. Her success, however painful, was pleasing. Let righteousness flow forth as an unending stream!

Aunt Emma was heard, at this moment, to gasp. It was not a kindly gasp.

But Count Roden-Rheyne pushed forward. Whatever his faults might be, he possessed to the full their complimentary virtues. He could not endure awkwardness anywhere, nor could he bear—begad!—to see a fine woman in distress.

"Baroness," he said, with a big, big B, and the clang of his voice rose brazen, "How is Count di Casa Profonda? I was with my cousin Stolzenau at the time."

Emma always maintains that he said "Who is," but

that is a little piece of feminine ill-nature, incompatible, besides, with the French language.

"Quite well, I believe," answered the Baroness gratefully. "Now, Dorothea,"—the bridegroom's teeth clashed—"I must go. We shall not soon meet again. From the bottom of my heart I wish you all happiness."

Dorothea bent forward her pure face, in her white, and her orange blossoms, and all the sweet splendour of sacrifice. "Kiss me," she said.

CHAPTER IV.

It has been said that the love which survives a honeymoon is eternal.

Like most utterances of human wisdom, this axiom can be proved either true or false, according as the significance varies, which we ascribe to the terms it contains. Truth, in fact, like honesty and all the virtues, is a matter of definitions, just as philosophy is a framework of terms misplaced. Anybody can pull out one of the timbers at the bottom, but it crumbles to pieces as he gazes at it in his hands. Anybody can maintain the exact opposite of what anybody else has just contended, and probably both are right. For both mean the same thing.

Thus, for instance, when Justus von Roden died at Lugano—but that is not yet—the parson came and said he was alive. Count Roden-Rheyna agreed with the parson, nodding his head and stroking his own warm hands, as he softly said, "True." And the little Generalin also agreed with the parson, casting herself down, in silent agony, by the earthly remains of what had made earth seem heaven.

Thus, equally, when married people begin to quarrel, they call each other "My love." And thus when we reiterate that love is eternal, none of us know what "eternal" is, and we all mean something different by "love." With most couples the silver is electro-plate, warranted to wear, and when it succumbs to early rubbing, they take up the dull lead and contentedly finish their repast. Very few—tiresome—people complain, and then there is a vulgar shindy. The cautious remember their children. The sensible do not want "love." The sensitive want too much. Few get what they desire, especially if they take it. The happy never realise any need at all. And some few favoured ones, while all the talk is going on, the running to and fro, the screaming, the laughter and the tumbles—in one word the Blind Man's Buff with Cupid—sit silent in corners, look deep into each other's eyes, and understand.

But, then, with such as these the game is over. The blind god has caught them, and spoken their names.

Egon and Dorothea von Roden, when first called into the circle, knew nothing of the rule by which you play. The rule, of course, is that there is none. You skip about, and shriek, and laugh, and the blindman catches you. Sometimes he only pretends, and sometimes he lets you go again. Egon and Dorothea were very pleased to marry. They knew little of each other's characters or inclinations; what little they knew they thought exceedingly fine. They liked each other's faces. In fact, they were "in love."

They remained in love all through their Italian honeymoon. And so, to revert to the words at the opening of this chapter, there was every chance that they would continue to like each other's faces, and admire each other's characters, for some considerable time.

At the very first an immense disappointment had befallen Egon of which Dorothea was absolutely unable to form the slightest conception. In fact, the difficulty to her was non-existent. She saw through a stone wall.

In the carriage which took them to the station he had flung himself forward, "My beauty! My own!"

Dorothea shrank back. "Don't, Egon," she said, softly. "You must never kiss me like that again."

"You see how mistaken you were to say that you trusted my goodness!" He spoke bitterly. She had hurt him with a lasting hurt: he instinctively felt that the wound would fester. It was true, as he had told aunt Mary, that the page of his passions was white. Dorothea's remained closed.

So a stone wall rose between them. Dorothea looked through it, smiling happily.

They wandered south as far as Florence, and there they lingered long. There was no reason, said the doctors, to take up their residence within hail of the General. Like all consumptive patients, the latter might survive for many months; also, he might bleed to death, before he could summon an attendant. The aunts and uncle Tony, of course, returned to Brodryck, with the swallows. Aunt Emma objected to the swallows. She looked round Dorothea's little upstairs boudoir. "There are no birds in last year's nests," she quoted. And certainly, it cannot be denied, that to those who are homeless or who feel

forsaken, the swallows, of all birds, seem to exaggerate the publicity they give to their domestic establishment. There is something feminine about the swallows' noisy home-bringing of trifles. Only, of course, unlike the human housekeeper, the birds look after their own bills.

To Egon von Roden the journey into Italy was in itself almost as epoch-making a life-event as the entrance into the wedded state. He was no art-smatterer, no attitudiniser in Soul. Of modern beauty-fads, post-Raffaelite pre-Raffaelitism (reverted, inverted, perverted), incoherent symbolism, æstheticism, spindly furniture or "antique" design—of all these forms of advertisement he had never heard. But he had been brought up, as we know, on the Goethe love of natural beauty in every human development, the pure milk and strong meat of art. To him, then, in a small way, as to the great master above him, the Italian journey came as something of a pilgrimage to shrines. He talked so little of these matters, so naturally of hotels, and fellow-travellers and daily incidents, the simple tittle-tattle of an unaffected man, that his new companion formed no idea of the interests hidden deepest in his heart. With our nearest and dearest we especially avoid those subjects on which their sympathy is not previously assured to us. When the pair had approached Florence, in the mists of sunrise, Egon, looking forth upon the russet city, had broken his unconscious reserve for once in a cry that, like all cries of emotion, repeated, falls flat :

"The city of Dante !"

"Yes," said Dorothea. "Have you got the tickets ?"

For she knew about Dante.

"Alighieri, Dante, dit le Dante, célèbre poète italien, né à Florence 12—(forgotten), mort à Ravenna, 13—(forgotten). Dans son poème principal, la 'Comédie Divine,' il envisagea l'univers entier du point de vue, actuellement bien démodé, de la philosophie de son temps et fit surtout opposition à la tyrannie corrompue des papes et des grands seigneurs italiens contemporains." Mort. Dead.

It was in Florence, then, where they stayed on during the summer, going up to Fiesole for the heat and coming down again, that they first realised how it is possible for lovers to misunderstand one another without knowing it. Our brain-life is surely the most elusive of shows. There are as many things that we realise and never know as there are things that we know and never realise.

They misunderstood each other, then. Not in those trivial fallings-out which season too much sweetness, like a spoonful of brandy stirred into a cream, not in those swift concussions of thought, which strike sparks of electricity on dulness, or those sudden little storm-clouds of sentiment which break a prismatic rainbow of endearments over the dull grey of everyday approval—not in these, but in the permanent divergence of interests, that sail away serenely, like boats on the river, unsuspecting what becomes of companions who may or may not have got stuck in some shallows of their own. Stay, conscience speaks: I must be good. You row back against the current, you stop beside the dawdler, not offering to help, wondering why you are there, for you know that he prefers the soft mud by the river bank. All the time that you are doing your duty your eyes gaze adrift, and he sees it, to the widening flow of the river, your soul is away over yonder, in the middle of the stream.

"The Pitti again? More Madonnas?" said Dorothea, laughing.

Egon laughed too. "Yes, more Madonnas. Or, rather, the old ones over again."

"You must know them by heart by this time. I'm sure I do."

No answer.

"And most of them are ugly, if you come to think of it. They are not at all like my idea of what the Virgin must have been."

"They are like the painter's," said Egon.

"Oh, Egon, how can you say that, when you know that they are mostly the portraits of the painters'——" She stopped.

"I cannot understand, Dorothea, that you do not care more about painting. Why, you draw in water-colour yourself."

She turned to him. "I not care for painting? I love it. But I think one can tire of Madonnas. *Toujours perdrix.*"

"But there are thousands of other pictures, not Madonnas. When we went to see that beautiful crucifixion of Perugino's last Monday you wanted to come away."

"Ah, you have not yet forgiven me that! How can you be so unforgiving, Egon? I am sure if you did anything unkind to me, I should forgive you at once. I could not go to sleep with an unkind thought of you."

"My darling, there is nothing to forgive. I only mentioned the fact to prove that you didn't care for pictures."

"And it wasn't even unkind of me, not in any way. When I said, 'Shall we go?' I thought you had had quite enough of it. But it is unkind of you to say that I don't like pictures, when you also say that you love them, for it sounds like marking a want of sympathy between us when we agree in everything, Egon."

"We do, dearest: I know we do. And in little things, when we differ, you always give up your own way. Why, at dinner, I daren't say I like anything, because you want to order it ever after."

She glanced up at him quickly. "You are laughing at me! About the macaroni," she said.

"Laughing at you? No, by Jove!" She looked so charming, in her partly pleased alarm, another young husband would have caught his wife to his breast and kissed her. Egon Roden was like other young husbands, yet he refrained.

"I will go and put on my hat," she said.

He seized her hand at the door. "Better stop at home this morning. It is going to pour."

"Since when was I afraid of rain? You only said that because you think I don't want to accompany you."

"Well, Dorothea, 'tis no use pretending. I think you love painting, but my study of pictures bores you."

"Bore me is not the word. But many of these pictures here repel me; I cannot bear to look at them. Now, the crucifixion you said was beautiful, it seemed terrible to me. Think what it means: the crucifixion! Egon, dear, as you say, 'tis no use pretending—not between us, not between us. The sacred pictures, the holiest subjects—they are just asterisks in Baedeker, stared at, approved, disapproved of, dreadful to see! The Christ-pictures, dear, they are the Son of God, the Saviour! Look at the horrible, bogey Christs of Cimabue and the Byzantines, the smug, good-looking Christs of Raffaele and Sodoma—think, dear, these are supposed to represent the Redeemer! When I realise that—and I cannot forget it—I want to hurry away. The crucifixion—think!—Christ dying for us! And there it is, all blue and green, with a dreadful face, pulled down, like a, like a—oh, I dare not say it!—and people staring at it, everywhere, peeping through those little funnels, pointing,

laughing—yes, there is *always* some fearful person in a check-suit laughing at something in the picture and pointing! And there is somebody, always, trying to kodak it—kodak the crucifixion!" She stopped, red-hot, gasping for breath. "Oh, say you understand!"

"I understand," he answered, wishing he did not. He knew that henceforth, if he brought her an exquisite rose—say an Ebenezer Gibbons—he would read in her grateful eyes the unspoken suggestion: "Oh, what a ridiculous name!"

"Couldn't you forget the people around you," he said, "and look at the Christ alone!"

But that was oil upon flames. "Oh, you haven't understood!" she cried in tones of the deepest disappointment. "I think the Christs are the most terrible of all! I have never seen a picture of Jesus that I did not at once wish to forget!"

He hesitated. And she told herself with poignant anguish that he would have felt as she did, if only he had loved as she.

He sat down again. He had not the slightest desire to see any pictures that morning. "I must write to uncle Tony, before I go, about some business," he said, resolved to spread his correspondence over the interval till luncheon.

She had put her hand fondly against his neck. "I am so glad you do my business nowadays," she said. "Give my love to them all at the end of your letter."

"I sometimes believe that your heart is in Brodryck, not in Florence!" he cried.

"No," she answered, "my heart is *here*." Her hand lay upon his shoulder.

They were very happy that evening at the theatre over an Italian version of "The Merchant of Venice." Neither of them knew much Italian, but that hardly matters with so well-known a play. The theatre was a new and increasing delight to Dorothea: tragedy, comedy, even farce, she enjoyed with almost equal fervour. But Egon found himself in the awkward predicament of having to find out the contents of a piece before he could venture to take his wife there. For had she not created a disturbance by rising from her stall and quitting the theatre in the midst of that roaring Palais Royal indecency, "*La Femme à Papa*"?

Once they were outside, and his masculine false shame

had subsided, he was proud of her for leaving, and he told her so. Still, nobody else got up. Just before them a grey-headed old clergyman and his wife had sat shouting with laughter at jokes they could not catch.

"Of course, if I had had an idea what it was like, I should never have gone," stuttered poor Egon. "Somebody told me to take you there, somebody I thought I could trust."

The "somebody" was uncle Karl, whose theory anent young married women may be given in his own words: "Scrape off all the whitewash. And then whitewash over again."

"Let us go, then," said Egon, "to the little opera, where they give all their own Italian music—you will see it is delightful: they could dream every note, yet they sing with a 'brio'! The audience joins—admirably—in the chorus! One slur—they detect it immediately and they hiss the offender off the stage. You remember that happened, years ago, to the greatest of divas: she will never sing in Italy again!"

Dorothea accompanied him to these cheerful performances of Verdi, Rossini, Donizetti. But they did not stir her blood. A singer himself, he followed every technical detail with interest, carried away by the sympathy between audience and performer, so noticeable amongst the emotional and musical Italians—delighted, as if he himself had achieved it, with every artistic success. She did her very best to share his enjoyment. But opera seemed to her, after all, a conventional form of amusement, too unreal to come within the bounds of legitimate fancy. Art, had said somebody, was the ordered presentation of life. When the chorus, wide-mouthed and immovable, had stood shouting for five minutes:

"The Count is drowning: let us fly to save him!" Dorothea, lying back in her "poltrona," felt that the limits of rational presentation had been passed.

"He sings beautifully," she said of the choked but still vocal noble. She bent forward, trying hard not to be too practical, to forget common-sense and Brodryck. "I like his voice exceedingly, Egon, but it isn't half as beautiful as yours."

"Why don't you sing at home," she ventured to suggest. "You hardly ever sing to me now. I would just as lief—far lieber—stay quietly at home and hear you sing, 'Ich

wollt' meine Liebe ergösse sich,' or, better still, 'Ich weiss, dass mein Erlöser lebt.'"

"A fellow can't sing in an hotel," replied Egon.

She opened her eyes wide. "Why, Egon, how absurd of you! You sing ten times better than most of these professionals."

"That's your partiality," replied Egon. He was uncomfortable. "Of course I know I've a good voice," he added, "but I don't like to sing in an hotel. People listen." Then she understood that he shrank from the notoriety which his splendid singing brought him amongst strangers. Once some neighbours had gathered in the passage. A lady had accosted him and proposed that he should perform in the hotel sitting-room. Dorothea did not ask him again. "When we get home to our own belongings, I will sing till you tell me to stop," he said.

Meanwhile they read, in their quieter evenings, books of the Italian renaissance, "Romola," for instance, and one or two bits of Boccaccio.

Dorothea, fascinated by the story of Savonarola, felt especially drawn to San Marco, where she soon succumbed to the charm of the angels of Fra Angelico.

"It is the beatific vision," she thought, standing, awe-struck, with Egon, before one of these vistas of carolling children; but she did not utter the words, afraid of his superior knowledge, unwilling to say something wrong.

"You enjoy Fra Angelico, dearest?" spake Egon, with measured satisfaction.

"Yes, Egon."

More angels—a long corridor with more angels—a couple of cells with more angels—then, a man's irresistible impulse to help his wife on:

"You don't find them, with all their beauty, just a little insipid sometimes?"

"I don't know. One feels that he painted them upon his knees."

Egon made no reply. He had stopped by one of the numerous copyists who, all over picture galleries, teach appreciation by contrast. Also, they guide the blind to the pictures you have got to have seen when you come out.

"That is very well done," he said softly, in German.

The energetic middle-aged lady, who was reproducing a violet seraph, presumably did not hear.

Von Roden fell back a step. "Would you like me to

buy you that?" he whispered. "If you admire it I should very much enjoy giving it you."

"Perhaps it is dreadfully dear," said Dorothea.

"Hardly likely. Poor thing, look at her ragged skirt. And she paints well, too. Poor thing!"

The grey-haired signora, scenting a possible customer—alas that so many possibles should go to the making of one improbable!—looked round, and answering in fluent French the young man's courteous greeting, soon proffered her dingy card.

"How long do you take over a work like this?" demanded Dorothea, after some desultory talk.

Madame perhaps a little exaggerated in her reply.

"I wish I could paint like you," said Dorothea.

But madame gave lessons. Why not? "There are so many competitors!" sighed madame, "and, alas! nowadays, with the excellent schools, so many paint well. One ought to be thankful for that, I suppose," she laughed, "and true, there is always the comfort of plenty who perpetrate monstrosities. But these also must live. Many tourists prefer the monstrosities—God is merciful!—these are brighter in colour, more life-like, they call it. Ah, monsieur, the world would be perfect if only all of us had a *little* more room to breathe! If I could arrange matters all the clever people should be poor, all the rich people stupid—thus would there be an immense law of natural balance—am I not right? The poor artist like myself should paint well; the rich ladies, like madame, should paint—poorly."

"Well, things very often are like that," comforted Egon.

She looked round at him quickly, at them both. "Not that madame is an artist," she said. "You are."

"Why? What on earth makes you say so?"

"It sees itself. *Ça se voit.*"

"But you are mistaken. I don't even draw," cried Egon, amused.

The nervous old lady flung an impatient dash across her palette. "I do not mean that you paint!" she exclaimed, but you have the artistic temperament—the artistic cut and expression of face! Yes, though you look like a Prussian officer also, it is unmistakable. I see it in the people who pass through all day long, before they say a word about the pictures. Here, into this little cell, they come streaming all day long, in and out again, the oxen,

the asses, the sheep. They stare, they grunt, they hee-haw: some of them only bleat. Now and then there comes one with eyes that look and lips that say little. In the entrance, already I mark him. There is nothing wonderful about him. Very probably he is not cleverer or better than other men. Sometimes he is very red and fat and plain. Often he is shockingly clothed"—she laughed merrily—"but I note him. I say, 'Thou art of those who love the beautiful, and who *feel* it.' That is all."

"I like that," said Egon.

"Of course you do," cried Dorothea, laughing merrily in her turn.

"Once there came one with the face of a tormented god," continued the old paintress, and her voice fell. "He came in through yonder little door, and I stood up and did him obeisance. He did not observe me. Among the sheep and the asses he passed as a winged Pegasus. That was not a painter at all: it was a poet. It was—— No, I will keep my secret. And I? I sit here and paint a violet seraph. I paint him again and again."

She splashed a few strokes of the brush on the angel's robe.

"When the good God comes for me and takes me to heaven," she sighed, "I shall ask Him for this, my particular angel. I shall not feel lonely then, and I have always been lonely on earth. Yonder, in the blessed meadows, there is no marrying or giving in marriage, but the dear God will understand, I am sure, that I have made this sweet, mild-faced angel more especially my own."

"I should very much like to buy this picture, if you will let me," said Egon.

"Thank you," she said quietly, "I must finish it. I shall do my very best." Once more she turned and looked at them, as they were moving away. "I call him Giovanni," she said. Then, as if obviating a question which would probably never have been put: "Not San Giovanni, the Apostle, of course. But amongst the angels, surely, as on earth, the great saints must have many little god-children. My Giovanni has, then, as patron, the Apostle of Love."

On the way home Dorothea was silent, busy with her thoughts. Egon fancied her extravagantly impressed by the religious element in Fra Angelico's painting. He made great fun of his own "artistic temperament" as discovered by the signora—more likely a signorina; wondered in

which part of him she had seen it; hoped it wasn't in his clothes; begged Dorothea to help him find out, and stopped in front of a shop mirror to study his hat.

"No, no, you needn't laugh; it is true," said Dorothea, gravely.

The tone of her voice struck him. "My dear child, do you mean to say you *don't* know what she saw it in? In my commendation of her painting, of course! She heard what I said to you. That was sufficient."

But Dorothea seemed unconvinced. Next morning—Egon having gone alone to the Accademia delle belle Arte—she sallied forth with the air of an innocent offender and hurried along the dark sides of the streets till she reached the church of Santa Croce. There she passed jerkily down the aisle and into the chapels, turning right and left, twisting back again, looking for something, eagerly consulting a thin little pale-paper book. At last she found an imposing monument, among many, which seemed to afford her satisfaction. Standing in front of it, she read from the booklet, with frequent glances at the drapery of the figure on the tomb. Then she abandoned herself to still closer inspection of the marble laces that drooped around it. Once or twice she referred to the page she had been reading, and nodded with intelligent approval at the tomb. Presently her search recommenced, more laborious this time, more painstaking. She hunted all over the worn pavement of the church. Once she sat down in despair, and stared around her. She wished she had brought Baedeker, which she could have done now that Egon was not with her. She by no means shared his scorn of the useful guide-book: on the contrary, she systematically studied it. "You daren't approve of anything that Baedeker hasn't asterisked," declared Egon. "He builds too low who builds beneath the stars!" She could not ask one of the teasing ciceroni, for, provokingly, she had come without her purse.

However, there came a moment when she seemed almost assured. She sank down by a much-effaced slab in the pavement, bearing some faint presentation of a human figure with illegible inscriptions. She studied this dusty ruin very closely, with careful allusion to her pamphlet, sitting huddled beside the stone. Her air of concentration deepened, as did also the puckers of perplexity all over her fresh young face.

"Dorothea, you shouldn't sit on the stones like that! Whatever are you doing?"

She started violently: her angry eyes caught Egon's.

"Don't! Go away. You are spying on me," she said.

"Why, I hadn't the faintest idea you were here. I looked in to see what Muther means, when he says—never mind, come off the stones. I'll go away fast enough, if you like."

"No, you may stay. It's no good," said Dorothea, miserably penitent. "I didn't mean to be rude, Egon"—her lips trembled. "Only—I may as well tell you, for I can't bear secrets—Mr. Ruskin says, if you can see the difference between the drapery on C. Marsuppini's tomb and the folds on Galileo's grandfather's, then you've got the artistic soul or eye, or something—and if you can't, you haven't, so I thought I'd try. You see, I never had any chance at Brodryck. And I've been trying my very hardest, and I thought I knew what he meant about the Marsuppini laces, but—but I'm afraid I can't really see anything at all!"

She had risen: her head sank on his breast, towards the slab at her feet.

"Don't laugh," she said: but nothing was farther from her husband's intentions. He came and stood beside her, drew the little book from her grasp and scornfully thrust it into his pocket.

"This same writer declares," he said, "that, if you can't see a particularly obscure little, half-faded fresco, which he names, is by Giotto, you had far better take the next train back to London and become a cheesemonger. Nowadays people are pretty well agreed that it isn't by Giotto."

"You don't quote correctly, but it comes to that, more or less," admitted Dorothea, brightening.

"Of course, if yours is a later edition, you've got a foot-note saying that the text is nonsense. All the new editions have those, on every page. The text is always original: only the foot-note reproduces other people's opinion." Suddenly he burst out laughing. "Why, you haven't even got the right tombstone," he said. "This isn't Galileo's grandfather at all." Dorothea, in spite of herself, joined him. "Not that it matters a bit," continued Egon. "Come along, dear. The carving is fine, as I'll show you some other day."

"I did see about the marble lace being bad," protested

Dorothea, "but then everybody is bound to see that at once!"

"Well, nothing is more facile than this system of divination—all or nothing. You go and look and you say: 'Yes, I see,' so, of course, you understand you are one of the elect. The thicker fool you, the sooner you feel it: no wonder that sort of ranter has an enormous following. It looks eclectic, Dorothea, and it's just popular revival religion, the Salvation Army, getting converted: only say that you're saved! Mr. John Ruskin, as leader of a sect, is a sort of art-General Booth!"

"What a lot of things you know," said Dorothea humbly.

"That's a nasty one!" he cried cheerfully. "But of course, I've heard a great deal from my father. He always used to take us children for long walks on Sunday, and talk to us all the while."

"I never had any one to talk to me. I love the aunts. But they didn't exactly talk."

"When it rained, we would go to the museum. And, you see, there were always father's three glorious pictures at home. I wish you could see those, Dorothea. I think we all owe those pictures more happiness than we owe to anything else. Yet, I don't know"—his voice lightened—"one owes such an immense lot of happiness to all sorts of things all day long."

"I have had happiness enough, as much, as I could bear, without pictures," said Dorothea contentedly. She checked all the suggestions of development that were rising in his mind—methodical beginnings, study in common, perhaps even the reading of Muther!

"Just so," he said.

"*Madame ne sait pas s'y prendre,*" says *Mademoiselle Aurélie Bompard*. "She is charming, she is good, she is sweet, and I love her. Seldom have I thus loved my mistresses, and yet I am a *'nature attachante.'* But all the virtues are no use with a man: he presupposes them. What a man wants is being actively pleased. A woman must please a man not by being herself, but by being his. Bah, all men are selfish, the best most, because they do not know it. Great sacrifices only are the part of a man: never have I known one that was capable of small ones—but of women they expect constant little abandonments that they cannot understand to be a sacrifice at all!"

"Madame, then, is selfish?"

"Selfish?—like the blessed Madonna. She would go through the fire for monsieur! Poor dear, she will probably have to! Selfish! Bah, it is no use talking to those who are too stupid to understand!"

Mademoiselle Aurélie returned to her brushing of dresses. "Poor darling, I will do for thee what I can," she said. And indeed more fully than Dorothea ever dreamed did she prove herself, as the Colonel had foretold, a treasure. Unconsciously, by discreet little suggestions, selections, combinations, she taught the unformed country girl what to wear, and how to wear it. Dorothea was always admirably—and, what is far more important—harmoniously dressed, that is to say, dressed in harmony with her surroundings of the moment. The Colonel's Riviera choice Mademoiselle Aurélie disapproved.

"What will you? Madame is now married!" she said, considerably, to the daughter.

Long experience had taught her to appreciate exactly the framework required by her mistress of the moment. Dorothea must not be fast: she must not even be gay: her requirement, at present, was to be cheerfully "*distinguée*." "The secret of being '*distinguée*,'" says Aurélie, "is not to desire '*que l'on vous distingue*.'" She herself, in complete effacement, most distinguished of maids, always praised as Dorothea's the taste which was her own. And, when her handiwork was completed, when Egon came in and said, "Dolly, you look stunning!"—then Mademoiselle Aurélie, although feeling somewhat like a cook who has successfully dished up a sweetmeat, would lift up her soul to the blessed Madonna, her *aider* in every good work. "I, in my way," she would declare to herself, "I do what I can. Marriage, after all, is a *pis-aller*, the world's greatest difficulty. I, when I escaped it, I swore I would do my best to help those that have not."

CHAPTER V.

IN Florence they received, towards the end of summer, one of those telegrams so long expected that they come as a surprise.

"I want to see you both.—FATHER."

This message arrived as they were rising from dinner. An hour later saw them in the night express that runs to Milan, and next morning, with the sun already high in the cloudless September heaven, they drove swiftly through all the beauties of perfect landscape and perfect weather—the summer glow of Italian lake and mountain—to the Pension Varoni, that stands just outside Lugano.

The General was in the garden, on a couch. Their first glimpse of him, after all these months, sufficed.

He looked into their faces. "Yes, I am glad you are come," he said.

He lay, propped on pillows, a white umbrella fixed so as to shelter his face. All the rest was sunlight, blazing Southern sunlight, brilliant on pathway and flower-bed and shrub. Behind him rose the chalk glare of the villa, broken by a dark green mass of orange trees that gathered their foliage like a screen round the sick man's head. In front spread the smiling city, the lake and the stern grey mountains that enclose it, under torrents of golden profusion: warmth, sparkle, clear splendour of sky.

"Yes, I am glad you are come," he repeated. He bade them sit down beside him, with his daughter and his wife.

"Konrad is coming, too," he added, "and the Child also is coming." "The Child" was the name that had stuck to the youngest son, Karl, the small cadet at Lichterfelde, "the pet with the pets," as his uncle had once sneeringly called him.

"I am glad. I am glad," said the General peacefully. He spoke with a painful drawing-up of his breath, and his eyes, above the glowing cheeks, glistened as if a drop of crystal lay inside them.

Egon took his hand. "Those are the three words I have oftenest heard from your lips," he said.

"Well, I have been glad all my life. There have been a thousand reasons!" The General lifted himself on his elbow somewhat. "My life has been beautiful beyond the wildest dream." His right hand sought that of his wife, and he smiled to her. "There was nothing wild about it at all," he said. "That was just the beauty. Beautiful, commonplace, day by day." But even as he spoke, a slight shadow of trouble sank upon his placid forehead. "I might have done more," he murmured. "Hush, dearest, I am regretting nothing. I have done what I could."

His eyes sought a familiar feature in the landscape—he turned them to the east.

"Dorothea, will you push aside those laurels a little. See, yonder, the statue of Tell on the market-place! Well, no, you cannot see it—it is over yonder. Never mind. No one ever did more than he—for his age, for all time—and now they say that he never existed!"

He sank back, exhausted. "But all that doesn't matter," he gasped. "The only thing that matters is to have been what we were intended to be."

He lay still for a long time. They sat round him, hushed, in the placid movement of the teemful morning. Life, sound, happiness, were everywhere. A couple of white pigeons came strutting about the path.

"My vocation," he said, with his eyes closed, "was to be a King's officer, to love you, and be made happy by you all. It isn't much, dears, but there are great men enough in the world—there must be a few happy ones as well."

"My husband," said the little Generalin, tremulously, and she pushed back the hair from his forehead, "thou hast been happy because thou hast done much, and done well."

He shook his head faintly. "I cannot understand all the happiness," he whispered. "I lie thinking of it night after night. See, all my life long there has been nothing but goodness. Even the little troubles have blossomed into flowers. There is only Egon's hurt that is lasting"—he felt in the direction of his son—"and, see, that has brought him Dorothea! Love her, Egon!"

Father and son clasped hands in the dark of the General's uplifted eyelids.

"Love her as I have loved thy mother. Earth can bestow nothing better than that."

"Have loved!" he repeated after a moment's silence, and there was protest in his tone against himself.

But suddenly he opened his eyes, and his voice grew stronger. "We know only one thing!" he cried, "that God is eternal, and is Love!"

Immediately his voice died down again. His gaze remained fixed on his wife's face. "Dearest," he said, "man can lose, but *He* cannot take away."

His daughter got up and gave him a few drops of cordial. A church clock struck in the distance. He smiled.

"Mathematically accurate as usual. I am so sorry, Gertrude." He tried to kiss the fingers that held the cup, but his head fell back. "You deserve a better reward," he said, "but children—mother, dear—you must not be angry: but I don't think I'm sorry to go."

None of them dared look at him. None of them realized at that moment whether they were weeping or not.

"Of course I should have liked to remain a little longer. Dearest, what matter a few years, after all? I have been too happy, and to think that I am passing from happiness to greater happiness! That is life for those who understand it—despite all difficulties and sufferings, that is life: a happy passage to a happier end."

His eyes were wide open now, looking at them all. "Is it not wonderful!" he said. "And God has sent me here to die, in the open air and the sunshine. Every day have I lain in the sunshine all summer—such a summer! It has always been my hope not to lie in a sick room, not to die in a box! Already I am in *Paradiso*" (for so they call this quarter of Lugano). "Yonder"—he pointed to the looming summits that almost meet—a granite wall—against the entrance to the farther lake—"yonder through the narrow passage lies Italy!"

He sank down again with fluttering breath. "The land of beauty!" he panted, "beyond the narrow passage. Beyond."

The lunch bell came clanging out to them from the villa. He motioned them all in the direction of the house. One moment he drew his wife's face quite close down to his own. "Leave me—now for a—little," he faltered. "I shall live to see Konrad and the Child here, but, if it

were not so, it—it wouldn't matter. Tell them—I—shall live—to——" His voice died away.

"He will sleep," said the Generalin. "He has been like this before. He prefers us to go, and let him rest."

They went into the house then, and made some pretence of eating, for the return of the travellers had saddened the long accustomed watchers by the sick bed. When they hurried back to the invalid, he was lying with his head uplifted, clear-cut among the pillows, in peace. The pigeons had come back, and were playing in the pathway. A breath of wind among the orange trees must have shifted the sun-shade, and the sunlight was pouring down upon the dead man's face.

CHAPTER VI.

"WHAT? Heh? What did you say?" Count Roden turned from his *Figaro* and put up his hand to his ear. He was sitting in the room he had occupied six months ago at the Hotel du Parc, Lugano. His nephew Konrad had that moment entered it.

"Speak up! You young fellows mumble so now a days—I wonder your own men can hear you."

"Egon is busy sorting my father's papers," repeated Konrad in a military voice.

"You needn't shout; I'm not deaf. Well, let him sort, and let me read my *Figaro*. If there's a rule in my household, it is this, that nobody disturbs me when I'm reading my *Figaro*. You know that. The *Figaro* requires care, or you're apt to miss marriages and deaths. I see they've put in the paragraph about your father, and they've got the name all right, which is a weight off my mind—the French are so apt to be careless. Ring for my coffee, Konrad, and leave me in peace!"

"Egon asks whether he may come and show you a letter he has found."

"A letter? Certainly, in half an hour's time, before I start for my walk. I can't have Egon, or anybody, disturbing me for every trifle: I have important business of my own. Letter? Nonsense. Your father was a very poor letter-writer; he never said, somehow, what one wanted him to say. Or is it a letter that somebody had written to him? Eh? It is? Very well; if its old love-letters, I don't want to see 'em. Now I come to think of it, I don't want to have anything to do with your father's old letters. Old letters are no business of any one's but the two persons concerned. The less other people know about them, the better. Your father was sentimental; he's bound to have old letters. But he was very discreet about them: never worried me, and I won't be worried now. Egon's a fool, but he's not such a big fool that he'd show them to your

mother! I never knew a man die, but there were old letters turned up about a child and things, and a lot of expense! And it's mostly blackmail. Tell Egon I'm busy—important business, and he mustn't worry me with dead men's letters." He settled himself in his chair. "And pull down the blind, if you please. This room, I believe, is neither north, south, east, nor west. I hate this place, and the room is the worst in the whole hotel. All these health-resorts are odious, excepting Monte Carlo, which is spoilt by the tables. Ring the bell again, if you please. Thank you. The attendance is outrageous. Now go away and leave me in peace!"

Konrad had stood watching him: one of the first rules all the children had been brought up to, was that nobody must ever interrupt the Head of the House. "Is it gout?" reflected Konrad, as his uncle's eloquence poured past him, "or is it simply garrulity? Old people should grow either talkative or deaf; not both."

As Count Roden, however, resuming the newspaper, turned his ear to the light, Konrad resolutely bent towards it.

"It's a letter from father to Egon. I'm afraid that it won't bear delay."

The Count flung round, red as a turkey-cock. "Confound you! I tell you I'm not deaf! What do you mean by yelling down my inside as if I were a speaking tube? Well, what the devil does the letter say?"

"It's about the funeral. He hasn't told me. He wants you to come and read it, yourself."

"The funeral! The funeral! Some stupid fancy, I bet you!" Count Roden-Rheyne shuffled to his feet. "Some nuisance about not wanting flowers, I presume, and the notices all sent out!" He grumblingly departed. "Bring me some coffee, and see that it's hot!" he said to the waiter whom he met in the passage. He flung open the door of his sister-in-law's sitting-room with what was almost a bang. "Ah! I beg your pardon, my dear," he said, bowing to Dorothea. The latter was sitting by the window, in her black dress. Egon, at the table in the middle of the room, had a box with documents before him. "The Child," lolling in a corner over a novel, pulled himself together as his uncle came in.

"Pray do not let me disturb you, Karl!" said his uncle, who especially disliked this god-child, simply because the boy was young and healthy and happy, and had all his life

before him. "What are you reading? Just the kind of book your father would have liked, I daresay."

The cadet coloured furiously. "It's Gyp," he replied, "She's no harm."

"Harm? No, indeed. She is, beyond comparison, my favourite author. But I doubt whether she was your father's. Which of hers have you got?" He drew the gray paper volume from his young nephew's fingers, not unwilling, perhaps, to keep Egon in suspense, as Egon had prematurely disturbed him.

"'Autour du Divorce!' Pah!" He threw down the book in disgust. "What affectation! You are not even old enough for 'Autour du Mariage.' But it's a clever book, and a great deal truer to life than what your father would have chosen—say 'Hermann and Dorothea'?"

The boy, with an impetuous movement, dashed the book violently into the little wood fire that was smouldering on the hearth. The crash sent a cloud of ashes and sparks over the carpet. A red-hot cinder alighted on Count Roden's toes, causing him to skip back with exceeding alacrity.

"D——!" he shrieked. "My dear Dorothea, again I must beg your pardon, but really, the young ruffian is mad!" He looked his excited god-son up and down. "There went three francs fifty," he said. "I shall remember, Karl, that you have plenty of money to waste." And he smiled.

"Uncle!" interrupted Egon, who had sat fretting, with an open document before him, "I have just found a letter here from my father, in which he tells me that he wishes to be buried in the place where he dies."

Count Roden sat down, put his finger-tips together, and nodded his head to and fro.

"Quite so," he said. "Well, it can't be helped."

"Of course it is very unfortunate that it wasn't found sooner, before all the arrangements were made for the journey to Rheyna. But there has been such a dreadful hurry about everything. These Southern officials don't leave one time." He looked harassed, thought Dorothea, as she watched him from her window.

"Very regrettable," said the Count, studying his exquisite finger-tips, "but, perhaps, just as well. Who's that?" He threw himself round as some one opened the door. "Oh, Konrad? Sit down. No, not behind me. Over yonder. Thank you."

"Everything must now be countermanded," said Egon.

"Eh?"

"Everything must of course be immediately countermanded."

Count Roden-Rheyna drew forth a scented pocket-handkerchief, and very deliberately brushed it across his white moustachios.

"Your father," he said, "was a man of many passing ideas. Did your mother know?"

"Not a word: I am sure."

"Or you? Of course not. Nor I. He cannot, therefore, have meant it seriously. I do not see that there is occasion for countermanding anything."

"But the letter is very peremptory. Quite brief and positive. He does not desire to be moved, to be travelled with! Read it yourself!" He held out the paper, but Count Roden-Rheyna made a deprecatory movement.

"My dear boy, no, thank you! I have no liking for dead men's letters. Of course I understand it is all exactly as you tell me."

"'In that place where I die,' he says, 'I wish to be confided to the care of Mother Earth. If I die at Lugano, let me lie at Lugano.'"

"Just so. It is like your poor father to cause these complications. He had ideas, had Justus!"

"But, uncle Karl—there is no time to be lost, then!" Egon got up. He staggered a little; he had hurt his lame foot the other day on alighting from the train. "I must go at once to the station!" he said.

"Stay where you are," said uncle Karl in a suddenly decided voice.

"My foot is all right again; I can take a cab. Nobody else——"

"Hang your foot! Really, my dear Dorothea, I fear you are almost, if such a thing were possible, a little in our way? You—eh?"

"Of course, if you wish it, I will go," replied Dorothea, "but I would much rather stay and hear the matter settled." She was afraid, and anxious to remain near her husband.

Count Roden-Rheyna slightly shrugged his shoulders. "As you will!" he said, relieved of all further responsibility. "Well, Egon, you understand, the whole thing is absurd. All of us have always been buried at Rheyna, and we can't make an exception for anybody, now."

"But my father wished to be buried here," persisted Egon.

"If so, he should have told us beforehand—given proper warning. Now it is too late. Everything has been arranged. In a couple of hours the train starts."

Egon sat where he sat, in dogged silence.

Unexpectedly, the courtly Count Roden struck his fist on the table, so that all the glass in the room rang again. "Who's paid for the whole business?" he cried.

"You have, sir, of course. Do you consider that relevant?"

"None of your fine airs to me! Dorothea, I have told you to leave the room. I have paid, and it is easy enough for you to say d—— the expense, but I say: the train's mine, and the dead man in it's mine, and the vault over yonder's mine, and he shall go into it!"

Egon bit his lips: his face was white. "You do not really mean that, uncle Karl," he said, "about the expense?"

"I am in the habit of meaning what I say."

"We are not as rich as you are, uncle Karl—my mother could not, but I am sure that Dorothea will allow me to refund you whatever amount has been unnecessarily spent." He veered round altogether, so that he could meet his wife's eyes.

Count Roden left Dorothea no time for a reply. He bent forward, his face suddenly purple. "You insolent young blackguard!" he screamed. "Hold your tongue! Or I'll box your ears, like the idiot you are!"

In the silence which followed they could hear him drawing his breath.

"At four o'clock the train starts," he said, slowly and calmly, "which takes on the van to Cologne. The servants are already at the station. We follow in the night. From Cologne the special train takes us and—it—to Rheyna. Everything is ready for the official reception. The mayor has learnt his stupid speech by heart. So has the steward. So has the parson. The school-children are practising 'We plant this seed for Paradise!' The yokels of the guard of honour have routed out the rusty bits of crape that did duty—in their fathers' time—for my father. They're all looking forward to the—to the pleasure, d——!" He sat back against his chair, compressed his lips, and once more balanced his finger-tips:

"And they shan't be disappointed," he added.

"Uncle Karl, it's all as you say," answered Egon gently. "Nobody is sorrier than I, but——" He held out the paper.

Count Roden ignored it, resolutely looked the other way. "Your father should have thought of the thing sooner," he said, "or, at least——" (fortunately he was too hard of hearing to catch Konrad's guffaw. Konrad sat a silent, and not unamused, spectator), "at least—you should have found this document sooner. Tear it up. None of you says a word to your mother; she has trouble enough. My dear Dorothea, you are the most charming woman I ever met; will you also be the first that could keep a secret? A secret not injurious to herself, I mean. The matter is at an end." He rose. "Unless you have any further commands for me, my dear, I shall return to the—interrupted—perusal of my *Figaro*?"

Egon rose also. "I cannot help it," he said. "You must forgive me. I have never disobeyed you before. I am going down to the station immediately, to stop that train."

Count Roden looked at him. They faced each other, gazing straight into each other's eyes. "Sit down again," said Count Roden quietly, "there can't be a public scandal over a corpse. Let us talk it over. You have plenty of time." He took out his watch as he spoke. "Three o'clock," he said. "The train doesn't start till past four."

"I can wait, then," replied Egon, sinking back much relieved. "Uncle Karl, if you will only look at the matter from our point of view, I feel sure——"

"The Child" had sprung to his feet, in his corner. His chest was heaving. "Why, it's struck the half hour!" he cried hoarsely. His colour came and went.

Uncle Karl turned slowly. "My watch must be wrong, then," he said. "It is not such a good one as that which I gave you——" He broke off abruptly and flung himself against the door. Egon's lameness had lost the day.

The old man wrenched the key round deliberately. "Nobody leaves this room till half-past four," he said. "I do not wish to hurt anyone's feelings, but I simply am unable to act otherwise. I cannot be made ridiculous—profoundly ridiculous—at Rheyna, and all over the kingdom. I have never yet been ridiculous in my life. I cannot begin now."

He stood looking at them all, curiously. He was chiefly annoyed at Dorothea's being thus locked up with his family.

Only Konrad had assumed an air of indifference, playing with the worn-out tassel of his clumsy easy-chair.

An authoritative bang on the door broke the tension. At the same moment it was flung wide open (for it had one of those defective hotel locks which require two twists of the key).

"Kaffee!" said the tall waiter, filling the doorway, with uplifted tray.

"Go to hell!" shrieked the Count—all his bottled anger and nervousness bursting loose.

"Your Excellency was not there," replied the waiter. "Shall I take it back?" The Child, overwrought, rippled off into an unexpected little rill of merriment. Konrad would have laughed also, but this time he was in his uncle's line of sight.

"Put down the tray and go!"

"Pardon!" said the waiter, hastily backing, for the little Generalin, in her widow's weeds, came past him, with a sad little cheerful smile.

"All here together?" she said. "Have you not yet ordered tea?"

Her brother-in-law uttered a groan. "Bringen Sie Thee," said the Generalin to the waiter.

"No, by G——!" cried the Count, who had edged behind her, near the door. She turned in amazement. "I—I don't approve of tea for young people," said the Count. He motioned out the waiter and now double-locked the door.

"Oh—I didn't know," answered the widow indifferently. "I never heard you at Rheyna—never mind: it doesn't matter a bit." She moved to a sofa. "Why, my dear Karl, whatever makes you lock the door?"

"As fate has decreed we should have our women mixed up in the business," said Count Roden desperately, "it can't be helped. Show your mother that paper, Egon, as you are wanting to do—I shall never understand you—and put up your watch. It looks absurd."

Egon silently handed the Generalin his father's letter, but he left his watch where he had laid it on the table before him.

"Well?" said the Generalin, lifting her eyes from the paper. "Well? It is very simple. He was right." She gazed from one to the other: a troubled look came into her eyes. Suddenly she sprang forward to the table. "The train starts in half-an-hour!" she cried.

"Yes," said Egon, "and unless you unlock the door at once, uncle, I—I shall leave this room all the same."

A thrill of horror ran through the limbs of some of his listeners. Konrad lifted his pale eyes and stared strangely at his brother.

"You will assault me, I presume?" said the Count. His upper lip curved: he certainly did not look frightened.

"Mother, don't be unhappy," was Egon's answer. "I've done all I can, all I can. Time presses. Uncle Karl won't listen to me. Tell him—tell him, please—you tell him—we *must* do as father wished!"

"But surely!" replied the Generalin. "Nor can your uncle mean anything else: there is some misunderstanding." She trembled with the emotion of the moment. "Hasten, then, Egon, or it will be too late!"

Uncle and nephew took each other's measure. "I am the Head of the House," spake the Count, "and I say: No."

"I have never disobeyed you before," answered Egon, and swung himself forward, seated, bare-headed, upon the window-sill.

Dorothea ran to him with a cry of distress. "Not that, Egon! Remember your foot!" She turned on the Count. "Forbid him! Prevent him!" she cried. "His foot!"

"I have done all I could to prevent," replied the Count with an evil smile.

"I can't help myself. There's not a moment to lose!" exclaimed Egon simultaneously.

Then it was, as the eldest brother drew himself up, measuring his leap, that the Child felt impelled to ruin all his own prospects in a moment, from that day, henceforth and for ever. He jumped off his chair, ran hastily forward, and, collecting all his youthful energies for one magnificent effort, kicked open the rickety door in a burst.

Then he stood staring, breathless, at all who were staring at him.

He felt that the position was embarrassing. "I'll go down to the station and tell them to unhook the van at once," he said. Whereupon he disappeared, with alacrity. His heart was light. And so, henceforth, would be his pocket.

When Count Roden spoke again, it was in quite a smooth voice. "Konrad, would you shut the door—as far

as practicable! And, Egon, I think you had better close the window. There will be a draught."

Egon did as he was told, came back to the table, and seated himself before his father's despatch box. Mechanically he took up the watch and replaced it in his waistcoat pocket.

His uncle had sat carefully watching his every movement: the last action seemed suddenly to exasperate the quickly infuriated old man. A violent oath broke from lips that abhorred swearing, in the presence of women, or at other men than menials.

"Defy me as much as you dare! Crow over me as much as you choose! You can bury your dead father exactly as you like!" shouted Count Roden, choking as the words pushed each other up his throat. Then his voice dropped almost to a whisper: "'Tis the worst hour's work you ever did," he said. "I'm not dead yet, like Justus is. Though you think you are safe, *my dear Count*, you're not."

He took up a paper-knife and toyed with it: Konrad still sat gazing at his brother's face, in his pale eyes that peculiar smile. The Generalin had begun to weep softly. Dorothea stood close behind Egon, white but still.

"I shall start for Berlin to-night," continued Count Roden, drawing imaginary designs on the cloth with the ivory paper-cutter. "I shall take in hand immediately the matter of the succession. I shall not leave a stone unturned—what?—I shall move earth—and heaven! If I have any influence with the Emperor, I will get this iniquity of yours, about the marriage, undone: Konrad shall marry when he chooses, if he chooses—and he shall choose, the sooner the better!" At the "shall" of the last sentence, the ivory blade snapped across.

"His Majesty dislikes these irregular successions; he has said to me before that he would prefer to see them gradually abolished." Count Roden's accents grew absolutely cheerful again. He rose and began buttoning his coat. "We will abolish this one. I *shall* abolish it. It has always been very doubtful, if the family contract is binding in a modern court of law. We will settle that question once for all: I have very little doubt of the Imperial decision. Egon, you have chosen, *madly*, to insult me, the Head of the House, without any reason whatever, to wantonly defy and outrage me. You have turned the brain of that poor silly boy and

ruined his future. And your own. And your own. Come, Konrad. I shall choose my own heir."

The younger brother went forward and the old man took his arm. "We must find a wife for you : who shall it be ? One as charming as Dorothea ?"—he swept her a deep bow—"but that would hardly be possible ! Or a quiet little German 'Fräulein' with more ancestors than cash ?" Near the door he stopped, surveying its splinters. "No lame lord of Rheyna for me !" he said, and went out.

Egon remained with his womankind. And of these two, Dorothea, bending over his chair, kissed him silently upon the forehead. He quivered, for Dorothea's affection, as has been said, seldom thus found physical utterance.

"He cannot do it," said the Generalin.

"Order the funeral against your will ? No indeed, mother."

"Appoint Konrad his heir, was what I meant."

Egon did not answer, for he believed in the power of the Count to do anything of that kind—almost limitless is the power of Power to do wrong.

On the next day they laid the dead man to rest, as he had willed, in the sunny graveyard at Lugano. Konrad was not present, having accompanied his uncle north. "I have lost two," said the little Generalin to herself, weeping at the open grave. The parson preached of life eternal, a long reward for virtue here on earth.

The Child, standing very erect, felt that, whatever sins he might commit hereafter, he had gained for himself already a good place up above.

CHAPTER VII.

EGON and his wife accompanied the widowed Generalin back to Bonn, and helped her over the usual dreary re-establishment amongst friends who are anxious to express, very quickly and kindly, sentiments they cannot be expected to experience. Then, as it was still early in September—the days warm and the promise of shooting splendid—they made a number of people happy by proceeding for a couple of weeks to Brodryck. Whether Egon was one of the many remains to be seen.

He had originally imagined that he would never be able to forgive uncle Tony: then, of course, he had forgiven him, utterly, from the heart, as we do. Great offences, especially if limited strictly to ourselves, our own hearts surprise us by readily forgetting: it is trifles we separate over in deadly feud. And that also, like so many other contradictions, is a merciful dispensation of Providence, for, if we distinguished rightly between stabs that crimson the soul and pricks that puncture a hand-glove, what would become of our affection for the dear ones who harm us most? As it is, all forgiveness comes easy, if only the offence be grave enough, and he who offended sufficiently indifferent.

The first sensation created amongst the villagers of Brodryck by the accounts of the bridegroom was one of disgust at his personal infirmity. Certainly, the peasantry were not prepared to give him a kindly reception; even Dorothea's popularity had suffered under the fact of her having married a foreigner, and, perhaps almost more, of her having married abroad. When it became known that the chosen suitor limped, the men of the neighbourhood, especially the old ones, said she was a fool for her pains, and many of the women thought so. It was therefore all the better that the owners of the estate should show themselves to their dependents, even though their bereavement prevented the customary triumphal reception. The

actual appearance of "the lame Apollo," to borrow uncle Karl's expression, caused a sudden divergence in popular opinion, for the women suddenly bade the men hold their tongues, and reproach bride or bridegroom no more. "The brow of Apollo," says uncle Karl, "and the foot of a sylvan satyr!"

Aunt Emma treated her young relations during their brief stay to much ironical but well-meant advice on the all-engrossing subject of wedlock, the marriage bond, the nuptial tie. Under the impression that Egon and Dorothea were an ideally blended and welded couple, harmonised and unified as water and wine (Dorothea being the wine, for aunt Emma was no humbuggy teetotaler, but enjoyed all good gifts of Providence), under this impression the dear old spinster was constantly pointing out to them their inability ever to separate again. They were not, of course, desirous to do so, but it is tiresome to find yourself referred to any human compulsion from which there is no other escape than death. In aunt Emma's little world "decent people didn't separate." "Divorce," said aunt Emma, "is a cutting of the Georgian knot. But I always thought that was very wrong of George!" To her maiden heart, that had cherished the man who married her dearest, and plainest, friend, there was something exceedingly beautiful in seeing young lovers happy. "You'll be sorry one day," said aunt Emma smiling. "Man loves but little here below, and he loves that little wrong."

"What do you mean, aunt Emma?"

"More than I say. Better ask your uncle Antony. How do the weddings go, dear Egon? The golden wedding—that's the first. The wooden wedding. The leaden wedding (that's twenty-five). The glass wedding—crash!"

"You forget the composite wedding, in between," suggested uncle Tony.

"Antony, hold your tongue. You are not fit company for young girls like Dorothea."

At this there was a great outburst of laughter, for aunt Emma was constantly forgetting that Dorothea was married, and would speak of her to the servants as "the Freule."

Uncle Tony, stooping, patted the recumbent Em and Doll, both heavily dormant, as usual, across his feet.

"Right, my beauties," he said, "you two are the only two women in the world that understand whatever I say."

The dogs lifted their heads and looked at him. "And that always answer right," he added.

"They are splendid dogs," declared Egon, and uncle Tony gurgled. "It is a pity you have not more sport hereabouts."

"We have sport enough," said uncle Tony shortly. He irritably blinked his eyes.

"More different kinds, I ought to have said."

"Kinds enough and to spare," began Dorothea, but aunt Emma's outcry covered her voice.

"Antony, I must tell you it was Em killed one of our last kittens, yesterday."

"No, my dear, no, it couldn't have been," interposed aunt Mary, nervously, and hastened to rattle the tea-cups—they still drank tea in the early evening at Brodryck, after a six o'clock dinner, drank it in the earwiggy summerhouse, or the glass verandah, with the windows down.

Uncle Tony sat up, very red. "It—was—not."

"It—was," replied Emma promptly. "I have proofs. She bit it to death."

"And if so," continued Mary, much flurried, "it was very small, just born. It can't have felt much, its body was so little, and we've thirteen left, dear Emma!"

"Mary!" Emma's eyes dilated. "I believe, for the sake of peace, you would hush it up if Antony had shot at the Queen!"

"How dare you suggest such a thing as that?" cried Mary, almost weeping; and "Leave sacred subjects alone, if you please!" said Tony, redder still.

Aunt Emma's voice broke down. "To say that its body was too small," she gasped, "and she gave it two bi—big bites."

Uncle Tony rose with majestic movements, rolling the cumbersome dogs off his feet. "The matter must be cleared up at once," he said; "I cannot allow these innocent children to sleep under such an accusation. Wake up! Emma, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, after all the tolerance they have always shown those little wretches with which you choose to litter the place."

"The little wretches have a nearer claim to share my hearth than you," replied Emma.

Uncle Tony vouchsafed no answer, but placed himself near a corner of the conservatory, very solemn, in the full light of the suspended lamp.

"Dorothea and Egon shall be judges," he said. "If they differ—— But no; of course they always agree."

"This is foolishness," protested the irritated Emma. "I know——"

"Hush! It was Em, you say? Come here, Em!" One of the dogs drew nearer. They both sat watching; their great eyes were full of interest, and also of unutterable woe.

"Em!" said uncle Tony in accents that would have touched the heart even of a human being, "you are one of the two finest Irish setters in this kingdom. You know what that *mea* is?" The dog, sitting on her haunches, a russet and golden glory, stopped wagging her tail. Her sensible nose was pointed to her master's face; she twitched the canny nostrils as if in assent. "*Noblesse oblige*, Em. Now tell me—your right leg means yes, and your left leg means no——" Uncle Tony stopped, looked round triumphantly at the old ladies, tried to wink at Dorothea, and, suddenly, more solemn than ever: "Now tell me—would you like a biscuit, Em?"

The dog thus addressed slowly lifted one silken paw, the right, and held it aloft. Her sister sat watching, immovable.

"It is something," exploded aunt Emma, "to have escaped the fate of marrying a man who can cover his grey hairs with folly!"

"Wait a minute before you produce your cap and bells," replied the old gentleman imperturbably, and he broke a bit of biscuit for the culprit. "All I have wished to do as yet is to prove to the judges that the accused has the use of her senses, and can honestly answer when addressed. Now listen to me, Em—have you finished your biscuit? Hush, listen!—this is much more important! Em"—no judge could have been more impressive in tone—"you see that big cat on the table, and the cats in the basket over yonder, and the cat on Miss Emma's lap—you know them? Cats, Em, cats! Now tell me—I know that you always speak the truth—right for yes, left for no—have you—listen well!—have you been naughty to cats, Em? Have—you—been—naughty to cats, Em?"

The deep-brown eyes of the dog seemed to grow larger with a liquid light of sympathy. Slowly she lifted her left paw, submissive, pleading, dignified. Uncle Tony faced the judges: "Is the case proved or is it not?" he asked.

"Mary," spake aunt Emma shrilly, "Caspar saw it done!"

"My dear, it was an accident," pleaded Mary.

"Have him in! Have him in!" shouted Tony. "No peace till this matter is sifted to the bottom! Pit the word of a menial against that of a gentlewoman born!" He pointed to the still testifying quadruped. "Put your paw down, my poor beast!" he said.

"Menial! Our Caspar! If I had so spoken of Sarah, Rebecca, or Rachel!" exclaimed Emma.

But uncle Tony had seized the little hand-bell off the table and rung it so violently that Caspar, at peace in the servants' sitting-room, scalded himself suddenly with his seventh cup of tea. Caspar was accustomed to be rung for gently, and with all-sufficient reason: when, therefore, he heard this hysterical peal, his fancy immediately leaped to a fire or a fit. It annoyed him intensely, on rushing in, with the tea over his shirt-front, to find neither the verandah in flames nor one of his mistresses on the floor.

"Caspar, I have always had a great admiration for your discernment," said uncle Tony. This was correct, but Caspar was not the sort of young man to be caught by the smell of soft soap.

"The ladies contend," went on uncle Tony, without moving other muscles than elocutionary, "that it isn't possible to distinguish one of those two dogs from the other. Now I maintain that to men who know them they're as different as—as a horse and a cow. What say you? Which is Em?"

To Caspar the conundrum presented no complications, for, unless in his own interest, he always agreed with his ladies.

"I don't know, sir. To me they look exactly alike!"

"Oh, Caspar, you said it was Em!" cried aunt Emma.

Uncle Tony turned triumphantly to Egon: "Now, I ask the two judges, what faith can be put in a witness who has lived half a dozen years with two dogs and don't yet know one from the other? And that against the word of a *dumb* lady who can say what she wants and discern right from left—unlike most of her sex!" added Tony.

"The court lets Em off!" answered Egon laughing.

"Not proven? A verdict! a verdict!" cried the vehement old gentleman.

"Em or En!" declared Caspar doggedly, scowling at Egon, whom, of course, he hated anyhow, "I saw one of

those big brutes"—an old score, this—"crush one of Miss Emma's dear little kittens in the backyard yesterday!"

"There!" cried aunt Emma.

Uncle Tony had twisted himself between the ladies and the man-servant. "Now, Caspar," he said, facing his cousins, both hands behind his back and a big silver rix-dollar atop of them, "I don't doubt that a dog killed Miss Emma's small kitten, but are you sure it was one of mine? You've not a quick eye for dogs, as we've seen. There are many other dogs in the village"—the rix-dollar signalled—"as—big as mine!"

A rix-dollar is only a rix-dollar, but in the continuity of rix-dollars there is charm.

"Well, certainly," said Caspar dubiously, "the butcher's dog is *very* like yours."

"What?" shouted uncle Tony, skipping right round. For Bofky, the butcher's dog, is a big yellow mongrel.

The rix-dollar twinkled high in the air. Aunt Emma rose. "Antony, why are you holding a rix-dollar behind your back?"

Her tone was awful: the silence which followed it more awful still.

Uncle Tony spun round again with even greater rapidity. "I——" he said, "I——": then he sank back into a low cane-bottomed chair and wiped his forehead with a red pocket-handkerchief. "I was twisting it in my fingers from sheer nervousness," he gasped behind the handkerchief. "You make me so horribly nervous I really don't know what I do."

Caspar had disappeared at a welcome sign from aunt Mary. "Let us say no more about it; it was all a mistake," proposed the latter lady gently, and Dorothea began talking very fast of villagers who were dead, or ill, or had disappeared.

"Then the mayor must kill the butcher's dog!" remarked Emma at her loudest to no one in particular. And, as she received no immediate reply, she concluded, emptying her tea-cup with a snap: "If he hasn't killed the kitten, so much the worse for him, and everybody. T'is a world where the innocent suffer for the guilty. Eh?"

"Poor Caspar's eyes are growing worse, I fear," interposed aunt Mary, as Tony made a mental note to speak to the mayor. Aunt Emma caught fire at once. "We must put him under a regular homœopathic oculist!" she

cried. "It all comes of your persisting with your herb-concoctions!"

"My herb-concoction is supreme for short-sightedness," said aunt Mary, with touching conviction; "but of course, if it is a case of genuine ophthalmia——"

"He only says that when he has broken something valuable," interrupted uncle Tony, getting briskly out of his low chair and general state of collapse. "It's a beautiful evening. You might walk back a bit with me, Roden."

Egon consented. As a matter of fact, his foot had by no means recovered from the fresh wrench he had given it at Lugano. Always more or less painful, walking now positively hurt him. But nobody noticed a secret the young husband was especially anxious to keep.

"Em," said uncle Tony, as the two dogs drooped behind him, along the moonlit high road. "Em!" He paused, bending round toward them, in his queer-cut, squireen clothes. "Em! Always speak the truth!" Then he walked on for some distance, chewing his big cigar, without further reference to the matter.

"Very true, very true, what you said just now about sport!" he remarked presently. "We have too few kinds. We lack variety. It's always rod and gun."

"No hunting, I suppose? Yet it's admirable country," answered Egon.

"No hunting, no coursing, no baiting of any kind. This isn't a sporting nation. Stuff about cruelty! Once a club of young swells got up a stand for pigeon-shooting. The police intervened at once, brought actions, as if it were a bull-fight!"

"I never saw a bull-fight," answered Egon. "My father did. He said it was a beautiful spectacle, and wouldn't have been really cruel, if it hadn't been for the horses. Not half as bad as a stag-hunt."

"Psha! What's 'cruel'? A woman's cruel when she won't kiss a man that loves her. All the same, 'tis women, bird-bedecked women, that have these fancies about cruelty. You may think yourself lucky at being allowed any shooting at all. Not a year ago Dorothea told me, just before she left for the Riviera, that she wouldn't allow any shooting on *her* estate!" He chuckled.

"No shooting?" cried Egon, astonished. "But hares and rabbits are vermin, and if one didn't——"

"Oh, you needn't talk the A.B.C. of common-sense to me," replied the old man testily, "though I had to talk it to Dorothea. I shoot every day of my life that God and the law will let me. Dorothea's, of course, was only a silly 'fancy.' She knows that as well as I."

"She has never hinted at anything of the kind to me," said Egon, a little restlessly. "On the contrary, she seemed to be glad to think I should get some good shooting here."

"Yes, yes, of course. Well, you owe it to me. 'Do you like roast partridge?' I said, and that finished her. 'Very much, indeed,' she says, for Dorothea's terrible honest. She has her faults (though you don't see 'em), but she's honest down to the ground. Unlike most women. Better leave well alone: she might start off again. Women 'll take to *any* fad, if they think that their doing so arouses your interest."

"You have great experience of women, uncle Tony," said Egon, smiling in the shade.

"H'm, h'm. H'm, h'm," replied uncle Tony. He slapped the big German on the forearm. "I'll always befriend you with your wife, my boy."

Indeed, he had done so. "I know men," he had said to Dorothea. "A woman can manage them easily, if only she lets them think that they have their own way. Remember the proverb, my dear: 'The husband's the head of the family; the wife's the neck.' I'm a traitor to my sex, but it's all the better for Egon: no household endures in peace where the husband's will is law. There never was a wife yet could bear the strain"—uncle Tony grinned—"you must give way in little things, my dear"—uncle Tony turned in the doorway. "And, remember this, my dear—you haven't forgotten asking me, on your birthday, if I knew the world? if the world was very wicked?—remember this: a man's wicked isn't a woman's, child."

"Oh, uncle Tony, that *can't* be true," cried Dorothea, flashing. "But it doesn't matter, besides, for Egon has got no wicked!"

The healthy old gentleman wrinkled his rubicund cheeks. "Quite so, my dear child, and yet my words are true. A man's wicked is not a woman's wicked, nor is a man's good a woman's good. Good-bye."

Dorothea, left alone, shook her head. "I can't imagine what he means," she said. "There is only one good in the world, and that's God's." She did not enquire whether

we all see that good from the same standpoint. And yet she herself had recently modified her ideas about shooting game. She had told herself that, as wild beasts big and little must be shot or snared (which latter is monstrous!), it was quite a natural thing that men should enjoy the excitement of skilful aiming: every other view, if you came to think of it, was sentimental, an affectation. Shooting, then, was honest sport, not brute torture, like angling. For men, such straightforward work was right, for women—no! Her face cleared: she thought she saw uncle Tony's meaning: other occupations, of course, were fit for women or for men.

But this by the way. Which now was nearly ended, for Egon stopped at a turn in the road. "You've no foxes or stags," he said, "so you couldn't very well have much hunting. But you've plenty of hares, and capital ground, as I said."

"Yes, indeed," replied Tony, reflectively, "I have pointed that out a dozen times. But a man wants encouragement. You stay over your birthday, I understand, next week?"

"Yes, in any case." Egon offered his hand.

"I am glad you are a lover of sport. And of dogs. I like you better than I thought I should, von Roden!" He slapped down his hand in the other's extended palm.

"I am glad of that," laughed Egon.

"You don't mind my saying it? Eh?"

"Indeed, no."

"What a fool you would be, if you did! Come along, girls!" Whistling, uncle Tony disappeared into the night.

Dorothea stood with aunt Mary in the garden, in the gentle moonlight, waiting for Egon's return.

"I am happy to think of your happiness," said aunt Mary. "Child, there is nothing in the world worth living for but love."

Dorothea was silent, not in full sympathy with the old maid's extravagance of language.

"If you love him truly, you will love him to the end."

Dorothea smiled. "Of course, aunt Mary, I intend to."

"Well, remember the truth of it, dearest, should misunderstandings arise."

"Why should they, auntie? Egon and I understand each other perfectly."

"Of course, dear: that was what I meant. But clouds will obscure the clearest sun. And therefore, always

remember, that, as you love him truly, you must love him to the end."

Her old voice faltered. Dorothea pressed closer against her, with drooping head, for thought of the two graves out yonder in the moonlit churchyard, the grave of the aged pastor aunt Mary had hopelessly loved through a lonely existence, and that of the young wife and mother, dead on the threshold of a woman's supremest happiness.

"Aunt Mary," she asked tremulously, "what did—why did—I mean, what was my mother's sorrow?—I have sometimes fancied of late that a great sorrow killed her,—and I have thought that it might have been—but tell me, aunt."

The old woman stiffened, in frame, and voice, and manner, suddenly hard. "Let the dead past bury its dead," she said. "Your mother loved your father, Dorothea."

Were the words a refusal, an extenuation, or a reply? The young wife shivered, unable to question more.

"That is Egon's step," she said. "Poor fellow! Shall we go and meet him?"

CHAPTER VIII.

ON Egon's birthday there was no shooting. A day of rest—and rational rising—had been decreed by the ladies after a period of successful sport with various neighbours. Uncle Tony's head seemed almost turned by the congenial excitement of doing honour to a brother Nimrod from foreign parts amongst his own sporting chums of forty seasons. He had much to say about Egon's shooting, its faults and excellences, and some—chiefly local—advice to offer, as becomes the old Obadiah, when out with the young Obadiah for long days in field and forest. "He's a good shot," said the old man to Dorothea. "He might be a better, and he might be a worse." Dorothea's indifference to this piece of information stung the incorrigible seeker after something to slay. "I have known many better, with half his opportunities," added uncle Tony rather spitefully. "Thank Heaven!" replied Dorothea. The old man twinkled his little black eyes at her. "What's worth doing at all is worth doing—better than other people," he said.

But this close intercourse in community of interest caused uncle Tony to fraternise most happily with the man he had intended to dislike, and the fact was agreeable to Dorothea. Also it brought the newcomer into easy contact with all the somebodies and somethings of the province, in circumstances favourable to superficial friendliness: the young husband, whose nationality and marriage to the heiress were equally against him, made a satisfactory impression at various shooting parties, and appeared to enjoy himself everywhere. Dorothea, therefore, felt that she had much reason to bless the pheasants and partridges, whose dead bodies she was obliged to survey, in the thicket, before luncheon, or at nightfall, in front of the house. During brief intervals of respite, when uncle Tony had "business," she delighted in showing her husband all the haunts of her childhood and introducing him to the

country people she had known and loved all her life. Here, of course, the scion of Rheyna was in his element, and the husband and wife found themselves enjoying a bright sympathy and eager agreement such as the sojourn at Florence had never developed. Dutchmen and Germans, especially if the latter speak "Platt-Deutsch," can make out each other's meaning pretty well when they wish to. Verbal intercourse, therefore, of a kind was possible between Egon and the peasantry around him. People of education all over the Continent—outside Spain—invariably understand a couple of foreign languages sufficiently for the needs of trivial conversation in either.

Together the young couple visited the manor-house and arranged how they would occupy it during the next summer holidays. Egon's plans for a future career, diplomatic or parliamentary, were much hampered just now by the quarrel with his uncle, who certainly would not help him at this moment in Berlin. He had therefore abandoned his original idea of going to the capital from Brodryck and seeking an appointment in the Prussian civil service. To avoid all semblance of a rupture, he agreed with his mother that no definite settlement should be made till after Christmas. Meanwhile husband and wife could go south again, "in idyllic prolongation of their honeymoon," said the Child.

The only one of Dorothea's friends to whom Egon did not take kindly was Mark Lester, the student, the dead pastor's son. Almost every husband dislikes the young men his wife knew and liked before she made his acquaintance. The thing is foolish, for has he not more reason to fear the agreeable youths she met after she had chosen him? But these instincts yield to no arguments. The most jealous husband is ready to accept his own pleasant acquaintances and resolved to object to his wife's.

"I do not like him," said Egon. "He is lean; he is melancholy; he looks cross."

"Then he looks what he is not," answered Dorothea hotly. "But some light-hearted people can never distinguish between 'cross' and 'sad.' I admit that he has not a loud laugh for every trifle; his life is too hard for that."

"Dear me, Dolly!" Egon lifted his eyebrows, ascribing to personal interest what was really more general loyalty. "I never knew you to fly out like that before."

"I don't know what you mean by 'flying out.' But

I cannot bear to have my friends ill spoken of simply because they are my friends, and that by people who do not know them." She walked to the window, with an air of great vexation, and stood drumming on the pane. The husband, of course, would have done wisely to let the subject drop, and therefore he continued it.

"You are most unjust, dearest," he argued. At that moment he felt overflowing with argument, all-convincing. "As soon as you are serious, of course I have nothing against Mr. Lester. I was speaking half in joke when I said he looked lean and cross. I hear that aunt Emma calls him 'Schiller.' I suppose he is a poet, a thinker. You wouldn't want a poet to be gay and fat?"

"Laugh away; he can't answer you," replied Dorothea. "He is only a poor student that has to work for his bread, and give lessons, not a gentleman of rank who can spend his days in the open air, and laugh over humorous stories."

The "gentleman of rank in the open air" had called up a grin upon Egon's face, which the "humorous stories" swept away in a thunder-cloud. For here was some of uncle Tony's clumsy handiwork. That terrible old man had told at dinner the night before how Egon had kept all the shooting-party in a roar over "lots of funny stories of his student days at Heidelberg." Dorothea had of course immediately asked for a repetition of the stories. Uncle Tony had nodded and winked and looked wise, and declared that the thing was impossible. "Not before ladies, my dear! no, no—out of the question—your husband was a sad dog. Some day he must tell you himself!" In vain Egon had tried to explain that the stories were harmless, as they were, tales of comic uproariousness, a glass too much, a practical joke or two, not fit, perhaps, for the ears of teetotalers, thought Egon. The more he had protested, the more uncle Tony had chuckled and made mischief. "Let us speak of something else," Dorothea had said in a voice which showed how the matter rankled. Heaven—or hell—only knows what she imagined the stories to have been. When Egon afterwards protested, the impenitent sinner had answered: "Stuff and nonsense! If she *does* think the stories were naughty, so much the better. She believes you're a saint" (uncle Tony grinned), "and if you're a wise man you'll make haste to disillusion her. No man on earth can keep his wife up to her idea of his worth when she married him. And Dorothea's

schoolgirl conception of masculine virtue is absurd, idiotic, unreasonable! Pooh! It means a lot of trouble some day to somebody." Uncle Tony took snuff.

"But please leave us to disentangle things for ourselves," pleaded Egon.

"By all means," said uncle Tony. "I'll tell her the stories weren't naughty," which he did, confirming, by his utterance of an afterthought, her uncertain but painful impression.

When, therefore, Dorothea referred to this reprobate occasion of mirth, her husband's face grew dark. He would gladly have asked her, in open words, what she feared were these tales of his youth unfit to tell her, but the question seemed impossible to his proud, and yet delicate, nature. He felt the hot blood rising at the thought that his wife should doubt him in such a matter as this. A man can speak to his wife of love and endearment and honour, but of purity, if he be pure, he cannot speak.

"Mark Lester is serious by nature. He is poor. He has recently lost his father. No wonder he doesn't laugh much," continued Dorothea.

Egon bit his lips. "I also have recently lost my father," he said. "Do you mean to insinuate that, because I laugh, I do not care?"

She turned from the window, facing him, with a beautiful backward movement of the head he had never seen in her before.

"We have been married about six months," she said. "Have you not yet learnt that I never insinuate?"

"But, my dear Dorothea, it was certainly wrong of you——"

She waved his objections aside. "I daresay it was. I shall probably do or say a good many things, sooner or later, which you do not approve of, but be certain of one thing: I shall never insinuate anything."

He looked at her. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed suddenly, "we are having our first quarrel. I don't know what it is about; it can't be about Mr. Mark Lester."

Dorothea held back. "You are provoking," she said quickly. "Perhaps you do not know how aggravating you can be." Their glances met, and all her annoyance melted before the softness of his gaze. She laughed as he drew her towards him, but the tears stood in her eyes. "Be good to me, Egon," she said.

"I thought I was perfect," he answered.

"Well, so you are in—in——"

"Theory?"

She stopped his lips with a kiss. "If ever I am very clever," she said, "I will tell you all I mean."

This was a couple of days before the birthday. On that morning they did not quarrel, but came down to breakfast late.

Very soon after the meal uncle Tony arrived, immensely important and flurried. To aunt Emma's inquiry he replied with such vehemence, "Nothing!" that everybody at once understood something out of the way to be the matter. His sitting down in a litter of babies was not an event to provoke comment in so feline a household, where the ladies themselves must be constantly tumbling over, settling down on, or otherwise getting entangled with various categories of kittens and cats. These little ones, however, too small to escape readily, fought for their lives with a swift determination, which caused uncle Tony to rise very hastily and mutter, as he rubbed the scratched part, some insulting allusion to the usefulness of Em.

"Eh? What did you say that dogs were good for?" asked Emma, watching him closely, behind her crochet.

"For lying *under* chairs," replied Tony. "I never allow any animal on mine."

"Don't you? But then, of course, dogs are such dirty animals, not cleanly, like cats."

"Ahem! I've got a present for Egon," answered uncle Tony hastily. There was a general outcry of astonishment, for uncle Tony, as all knew, detested presents, not, certainly, from want of generosity, but rather on account of the worry of selection. Even to Dorothea he had never brought other gift than a gold piece on her birthday and another on his, in the summer; only to aunt Emma he presented an annual unnecessary trinket, a ring or a brooch. She put them all away in a cedar box, with a wisp of his hair of the time when it was golden. In the same "casket" were also one or two relics of the man who had married her dearest, and plainest, friend.

"Yes, I have a present for Egon," repeated Tony. He refused to give any further explanation; on the contrary, he openly invited Egon to share his morning walk. "You can't sit spooning all day," said Tony. "Come away with me now for an hour in the woods. You can spare him, can't you, Dorothea?"

"Oh, till lunch," replied Dorothea, laughing, and Egon wondered if she would ever notice the difficulty in walking he would rather have died than declare. But Dorothea, perfectly healthy herself, had no aptitude for discovering hidden ailments, could only realize, in fact, those which write themselves plain, such as colic or a broken leg.

"Yes, go away; we are busy for the children," said aunt Emma. "Dorothea has chosen to treat Egon's birthday exactly as if it were her own."

"Considering I shall not be here on my own," explained Dorothea.

But uncle Tony, with many winks and signs, had already enticed von Roden out into the fresh autumn morning. "Come along with me! Come along with me!" repeated the old gentleman excitedly. He led the way through the shrubberies, skipping nimbly and mumbling to himself the while in extremest glee. "Quite right," he said suddenly, "you were very right. You remember saying the other day that we lacked variety over here?"

"Variety?" answered Egon.

"Yes, in our forms of sport," explained uncle Tony, very testily.

"Oh yes, quite so, in your forms of sport."

"Well, one would almost think that you didn't care." Uncle Tony stopped where the shrubbery opens out into the lower field. He looked aggrieved.

"Oh yes, I care, but, you see, it can't be helped," said Egon hastily.

"Can't it?" replied uncle Tony with a ready chuckle. His own keeper came forward at that moment from behind a clump of trees. "Well, Jansen, have you got 'em there?" asked uncle Tony.

The keeper touched his hat.

"Everything ready?"

"Everything, sir."

The lower field is barely five minutes' walk from the ladies' house, upon the Brodryck property. It stretches over a couple of acres, lying encircled in brushwood, which climbs across the top of a grass-grown mound, thus hiding upon the other side a favourite seat of Dorothea's. At the nearer end stands a group of birches, and from behind their silver stems now proceeded into view a tiny boy and a great big hound. The dog required a lot of dragging, to which he good-naturedly submitted, while resenting it.

"You know what *that* is!" exclaimed uncle Tony, beaming, and slapped his thigh.

"A greyhound," answered Egon. "A—a—what do you call it?—a harrier."

"A harrier!" shouted uncle Tony. "And the best to be got for the money—half a dozen prizes! The female is coming in a day or two; I couldn't get her sooner. We'll breed them, my boy!"—slap—"we'll have a regular pack!"—slap—"we'll have coursing matches; and, by George, we'll introduce coursing into this country!" Slap! slap!

Egon watched the beautiful brute, and the little chap slowly tugging him over the grass.

"They're my present to you, my dear fellow, the pair of them. *You* shall have the honour of keeping and breeding them," said wily uncle Tony. "*You* shall introduce the thing amongst us, I say! It shall be connected with your name in this country. Next to the discoverer of a new food comes, in his claim on human gratitude, the inventor of a new game. See?"

"Yes, yes; it's very good of you," said Egon. "And it's first-rate sport of its kind." By this time they had met the hound half-way, and Egon stooped to pat him. "Leporello is his name," said uncle Tony. "I wrote for him as soon as you had put the idea into my head, but he only arrived last night. I was in a great flurry about him. But I think he's all right. You must have a pack. Yes, you must introduce coursing into this country!"

"You see, we can't have the great doings you told about at Rheyna," he said, "no deer-shooting in forests, or things of that kind, but there's no reason why we shouldn't hunt hares." He fell eagerly to discussing the animal's points, and Egon, who really knew more about the whole matter than Tony, delighted the old man with the information he gave.

"It's a pity we can't try him," said Tony.

"Well, yes, so it is!"

Uncle Tony gave a little crow of enjoyment. "Now then, Jansen!" he said. At the same time he took the leash from the boy's hand. The keeper disappeared for a minute, and returned holding a bag which he had steadied with some inconvenience. Something in the bag struggled and fought. One look at the dog was sufficient to tell what were the contents of the bag.

In a minute or two, after a certain amount of explanation

and loud direction and oburgation from uncle Tony, the keeper, standing ahead, opened the bag across the grass. Immediately the hare was out! The straining dog had dragged loose, sending uncle Tony flying behind him, legs up in air. Quarry and pursuer flew away, a swift trail along the smooth surface of the field. In another instant the hare doubled, the dog already gaining upon him; they slewed round, with quick loops and lacings, a beautiful sight undeniably, in spite of its cruelty. Uncle Tony sat up, red-hot, shouting and cheering like a madman. Egon, with a flow of boyish excitement, joined in. The keeper and the boy stood stolid.

Of course it was very soon over. "He's got another in a bag still," cried Tony, running forward. The two men, the dog, the dead hare, were grouped in the middle of the field.

Dorothea stood on the mound, her lithe figure framed in the hazel bushes. She had pushed some branches aside and was holding them away. Both uncle Tony and Egon had seen her.

She came half-way across the field, very quickly. "Now this is just what I should have chosen," said uncle Tony, a little nervously. "Better get it over at once, if she objects. You must be very firm with her, Roden; your whole future comfort is at stake."

Egon did not answer, though he felt that what uncle Tony had said was correct.

"If you are to be ruled in such common-sense matters by the whims of your wife——" But Dorothea was within hearing; he broke off.

She came quite close to them and stood studying for a moment, as it were, the dog, the little dead beast on the grass, especially the little dead beast. Then she lifted her slow eyes to Egon's face. "So it is true," she said, and turned, and walked back again across the smooth, green grass.

The two men stared at each other. "She takes it very quietly," whispered Tony. "Elle en prend son parti, the best thing she could do. By Jove, we'll have otter hounds!"

But Egon was after his wife, across the grass.

"Dorothea!" he called. She quickened her pace.

"Dorothea!" No answer; she was walking too fast for his lameness. Uncle Tony and the servants stood watching. He realized the absurdity of his position. Resolutely he came back.

By uncle Tony's side he waited in silence, watching her as she rapidly passed up the mound, into the bushes, behind the hazel leaves. She was gone. Uncle Tony drew a deep breath. "We'll have out the other hare," he said. "Yes, by George, we will," replied Egon.

Meanwhile Dorothea sped out of sight or hearing, and then paused, with a beating heart. She looked right and left, like a hunted thing, straining forward as if the dogs were upon her. "It is not possible," she said, shuddering, "not possible!" and she pressed her hands upon her eyes, as if she had dreamed a dream.

She wandered away down to the village, the church, the churchyard, creeping to her mother's grave, as had been her childish custom when in sorrow or disgrace. The thing came natural to her still. Often she had lain there sobbing her griefs into the greensward. "I've been naughty again, mother. Oh, I want to be good!" She had long had an idea that this dead mother could help her. Alas! nobody else could—a thought that aunt Mary had never openly combated, though aunt Emma, with tears of sympathy in her eyes, had declared it was papistical trash, and Dorothea must conquer such fancies. The child, therefore, had wept more hopelessly by the grave, from which the white cross stared coldly at her. "Blessed are the pure in heart," it said. Dorothea knew that was not for her. But, not being sentimental, she soon dried her futile tears and, accepting her corruption, made the best of a bad business. In fact, could she have read her own heart, she would have found it to contain a distinct impression of unfairness, that a child so very faulty should receive so little benefit from a perfect mother in a better world. As a wee bairnie, she had long prayed: "Please God, send mother back for Christ's sake"—suddenly one night she had changed this to "my sake;" then came the horrible evening, after long months, when she fully admitted to herself that the petition was hopeless, and dropped it.

"Please God, send mother back for my sake. Amen." She now thought of that reiterated demand with a pitiful smile. She remembered how she had trembled at making the substitution, wondering whether it was blasphemy, too honest to ask any longer for the Lord's sake what she felt that she needed and desired for her own. The first time she had said it, in her cot, after the light was out, she had shut her eyes, half expecting to be struck by lightning—

then she would go to her mother (for Dorothea never, in spite of aunt Emma, believed in hell)—nothing happened; even now, a grown woman, she shuddered, disappointed at the thought. She stood looking at the grave, vaguely wondering if the presence of a mother by her side—for instance, over yonder at Nice—would have altered the whole course of her life. What had she not learnt of the world since she had stood here last? She had gained and lost a father. Had she gained and lost a husband? No! no! no! She had gained and held them both.

"At last!" said a voice behind her. She turned to greet Mark Lester.

"I knew you would come some day," he said. "I thought you would come a great deal sooner."

She could find no reply to what seemed a reproach.

"It is the first time, Dorothea, that we meet alone since—your marriage."

"Yes, we have been very much occupied, my husband and I."

"I know. I am preparing, as I told you, for my ordination. If all goes well, I shall be inducted into this place next spring, unless you, who are the lady of the manor, refuse your consent."

"Perhaps I shall," she said, smiling.

"Or is it your husband nowadays who must give his?" He had no idea of the bitterness that lay in his tone. He added: "If so, he will probably refuse it. I ought to be sorry, and I shall be glad."

"Mark!" She turned, shocked by the wretchedness in his eyes.

"Don't pretend, Dorothea; you know very well he doesn't like me! Does it matter? I sit and work in the garden yonder; I can just see this cross through a gap in the shrubbery. I knew you would come. I wanted to give you here my father's last message for you."

"What was it?" she asked softly.

"He told me, an hour before he died, to remind you of his birthday text. He did not say what it was."

"'And to keep yourselves unspotted from the world,'" said Dorothea, gazing at the cross before her. "What does it mean, Mark?"

"I do not know. I have not the faintest idea. Don't ask me. What is 'the world'?"

Dorothea was silent.

"But of course anyone can see what it must mean to *you* . to remain just as you are, good, among all the bad people who surround you."

"But I have no bad——" She drew breath; the scene in the field rose before her.

"You are leaving to-morrow, are you not? Before I go back to my book, tell me that you are happy. That is all I want to know."

"You used to say, Mark, that no one had a right to be happy."

"Tell me that you are happy," he insisted, but she saw in his face that she had answered him.

"I am as happy as I deserve to be," she said.

"For a person as humble as you are to say that, you must be very wretched."

"Nonsense, Mark!" She laughed. "We are going back, as you know, to Italy to-morrow. We intend to take a house on one of the lakes for the autumn, and then winter in Rome. Now, I want you to promise to come and see us in our house—we shall have other guests; I want you to come. You can work there; the change will do you good. You are not looking well, Mark. I am sure you will like Egon when you know him better; you have many things in common."

Mark made as if he would speak, but checked himself. He could not tell her that they had one thing in common which separated them most.

"No, I cannot come," he said. "It is very kind of you, but I cannot come."

"I will write to you. I shall send for you, Mark."

"Don't, Dorothea!"

"Yes, I shall. And you will come."

"Good-bye," he said, walking towards the little parsonage gate. But half-way he turned back.

"We are brother and sister," he said, "are we not? We have known each other all our lives. I want to ask something; I daren't, but I must. Dorothea, I can stand no longer the agony of doubt I have been enduring through all these months. It keeps me from the thoughts I should be thinking night and day. Tell me, before we part—by our old friendship—you have married a man you didn't know. Most women do. You love your husband?"

No, she was not angry with him as he stood there before her, worn, and gentle, and strong with some hidden fire of

suffering. The world had gone hard with Mark Lester. All things were against him; he was honest of lip—that may often succeed—and of thought—that fails.

Full of tenderness for the old friend here before her and the husband yonder in the meadow, she answered: "I love him from the bottom of my soul."

"Thank God!" replied Mark, and left her.

Egon, returning early, did not see Dorothea again till just before luncheon, when she met him purposely, as he presumed, in the hall.

She stopped opposite him, enduring his questioning glance with hardened eyes.

"Egon," she said, "I have no right to interfere with your amusements. There are things I suppose I could resent, but this is not one of them. Let us please not refer to the subject."

"Dorothea, the brute was uncle Tony's birthday present. If you like, I'll——"

"Pray do not ask what I like. Besides, that is quite unnecessary. Anyone who could possibly derive the faintest satisfaction from so hideous an exhibition of cruelty is too utterly removed from my way of thinking in such matters to make *any* discussion or explanation advisable between us."

Her figure trembled, but her face was firm.

"Of course," he said, "if you deem all explanation unadvisable——"

"I do. Where such difference exists as could render *possible* your amusement of this morning, all further talk would but lead to recrimination. Please let me pass."

Looking into her eyes, he saw that here was no misunderstanding, no divergence of sympathy, but resolute separation, momentary dislike. He rebelled against the rashness of her verdict as he moved aside. She passed by him.

"Egon!" she cried, with a woman's swift revulsion of tenderness. "You *cannot* say that you enjoyed the monstrous cruelty of that brutal sport!"

But he was angry with her, and, above all, loyal to his comrade in crime. "I do not see," he answered, "why a man cannot take an interest in coursing without being branded as a monster of cruelty too horrible for words."

She vouchsafed him no further reply. Aunt Mary at luncheon lifted her glass—of water. "My dear nephew

and niece," she said, "to-morrow you leave us; may the good God go with you! And all through life's journey, to the end, may you always be as happy and united as you are to-day!"

In the lower field, the keeper, Jansen, stood looking down at two dead hares. "Funny tastes the great people have!" he grumbled. "A shameful thing it seems to me, boy, but it comes from foreign parts. Keep back that brute! The Freule—beg pardon, the young Mevrouw—was right to go back again. That my old master should be such a fool!"

CHAPTER IX.

ON the blue waters of the Lago d'Orta, loveliest amongst the smaller lakes of Lombardy, in the silver sunshine sparkling through them, and the golden sunshine pouring over them, and the grey autumnal heat mist thinly veiling the calm mountains all round them, on the bright blue waters of the Lago d'Orta, a gaily painted rowing boat, with the German colours pendent from its stern, was lazing languidly against the little waves that laughed towards it. The rowers had dropped their oars and lay back amongst the coloured cushions. The charm of the sleepy landscape was upon them, the *dolce far niente* of perfect stillness and blazing heat that will soon be turning into chills. It was early in October; summer was dying slowly, superbly, with sudden revulsions, as a woman's beauty dies when the gods, and her heart, are good.

"Egon," said Dorothea, "this place is the most beautiful of all."

"I am glad you think so, dearest." He kissed her, and she let him kiss.

"It has been paradise to me through these ten days. I have never been so happy before."

"And what, in your paradise, am I, the old Adam or the snake?" She put her hand across his mouth.

"You said you had forgiven me," she answered.

"I never did!"

"Egon, you remember ——"

"I said I had nothing to forgive. I am glad that we spent those two days at Bonn, Dorothea. My mother was right in scolding me. She said I ought never to do anything I knew you didn't like."

Dorothea dabbled her hand in the rippling water. "She scolded me, too."

"I am sure she would never have ventured." His face clouded over at the thought that his mother should know.

Dorothea looked down on her fingers, bent by the

current. "I will tell you exactly what she said; why not? She spoke to me of her union with your father, her happiness. 'I loved him,' she said, 'neither for his faults, nor in spite of them, nor for his faultlessness, but simply because he was he, and I was I.' So, you see, nobody made mention of you, sir."

"You are willing, then, to love me in spite of my blemishes? Before we married I told you it was not fair to expect me to prove perfect. Perfect, good heavens! You will have to make up your mind, Dolly, that you have married a very ordinary every-day mortal, who certainly can't fly." His glance stole along his recumbent frame, slowly down to his foot.

"I don't want you to fly; you might fly away!" said Dorothea, her eyes wandering over the lake.

His answer could only be a lover's answer. It was true that these days on the lake had marked a period of simple happiness. The two were alone, in their white Italian villa, sheltered from advisers, hidden from strangers, on this golden backwater of touristdom. They were alone, then, with their honest desires towards each other, with nature, that gave them all things to enjoy; and their hearts wanted friendship, not discontent. So they spoke not of differences in the sunlight, but sank down the stream side by side.

"Sing to me!" said Dorothea. "There is nobody near. The bells of San Giulio have struck midday. All Italians are at lunch or asleep."

"What shall I sing?" he asked, in the drowse of the boat upon the water. 'Ich wollt' meine Liebe ergösse sich'?"

"Oh, no, not that; it is Sunday."

He smiled at what seemed to him, the German, one of Dorothea's queerest fancies. "Does love stop overflowing on Sunday? Do torrents, or wells?" he said. "Mine doesn't."

"Now you are so literal, Egon. You couldn't mean 'Ich wollt' meine Liebe ergösse sich' to me, because I'm not away."

"Why, you are more literal than I am; I should have thought of you all the time. But I will sing you something else." And he began the "Ave, Maris Stella!" of Gounod. The fair lake was absolutely peaceful. Far and wide it shone to the shining hills around.

Presently he straightened himself out of his listless

attitude and bared his head, the while he continued singing, his face and form unconsciously assuming an air of reverential calm. Dorothea, of course, could not cast off the prejudices of her sternly Calvinistic upbringing. In Florence she had timidly spoken once to Egon of her panic fear of his perversion.

"Leave me what little faith I can develop," he said. "I fear, as it is, it will hardly suffice to carry me through."

She listened now with tears in her eyes and a lump at her throat. She could not prevent these from coming whenever Egon sang.

"I will sing you a hymn," he said, and he poured forth a couple of the great German chorals: "*Ich bete an die Macht der Liebe*" and Luther's "*Feste Burg*."

The little boat rocked as the great notes of the latter rolled forth in volumes of harmonious sound. "Why don't you join in?" he asked.

She gazed at him in adoring admiration. "That would be sacrilege," she said. But he laughed so immoderately, he almost hurt her. And they rowed a little, idly, making slow progress towards the shore.

"It is getting on for lunch-time," said Egon.

"Egon, I don't know why it is, but I flatter myself you never sing quite so beautifully as when you sing to me alone."

He smiled. "I know why it is. And so do you—coquette!"

"Don't call me that."

"Why not? It is flattery, within limits, to a woman."

"Surely you don't think a coquette could be a good woman?"

"No, but I think a good woman could be a coquette."

"You are laughing at me," she said, rowing faster.

"On the contrary, I mean what I say. A man's life is all the happier for a pretty woman's whims. Don't be too good to me, Dolly; you must tease me sometimes."

"I don't think you like being teased at all," she answered, with sundry memories of what, on her part, had not been so much teasings as teachings. "Who is that on the terrace—a stranger?"

Egon looked. The boat was running towards their little grey-stone port, from which steps went up to the flowered terrace, the white villa behind it.

"It is Konrad!" exclaimed Egon. Dorothea lifted her

face, and the figure bared a but thinly planted head. Konrad came leisurely down the steps; he was always scrupulously attired, and his wiry, nondescript hair and waxed moustache stood out neatly against the blue baldness of his skull and cheeks. In many ways he looked and seemed older than Egon.

"Can you put me up for a day or two?" was his greeting.

Dorothea stopped with her hand in her husband's, her one foot on the stone step. "Adieu, Paradise!" she said; Egon pressed her fingers. She climbed towards Konrad with words of welcome.

After luncheon, when the two brothers were alone together, the younger condescended to offer a few words of explanation.

"Uncle Karl is as furious with you as ever," he said, watching an *aquila pescatrice* that swooped across the lake.

"So I imagined," replied Egon.

"It isn't any fault of mine, I assure you."

Egon cast a swift side glance at his brother's sallow face. "That remark hardly shows your usual ingenuity," he said.

"'Qui s'excuse'—"

"'S'accuse,'" continued Konrad coolly, striking a match. "Did you ever hear a proverb that wasn't a lie or a platitude? This is one of the lies, the bigger ones. Well, uncle Karl is just simply mad. He never was crossed, it appears, in all his life before. He'll never forgive you till he dies."

"He will after," said Egon. Konrad stared, wondering whether marriage with a saint was beginning to upset Egon's always rather wobbly brain.

"If you mean the will, you are mistaken," he answered, with slow consideration. "He says that he's left me every penny he can."

"I am very glad for you," said Egon drily. "Besides, you may need it more than I."

"Yes, we can't all of us marry heiresses. I hope your good fortune is all that people said." On this subject Konrad was curious beyond discretion; moreover, he had been commissioned by uncle Karl to find out more than he could.

"Thank you, we have quite as much as we need. For the present uncle Tony looks after the estate."

Konrad drew a long whistle. "You are not a man of business, Egon!"

"No, but I am going to be, when the honeymoon is over."

Konrad had expected a different conclusion—a reference to Rheynd. "The honey-year!" he sneered. "Well, as I was saying, uncle Karl is moving heaven and earth, as he threatened he would, to get a free hand about the succession."

"Shall we talk of something else?" suggested Egon, annoyed.

"No, let me finish. There is not the remotest chance of his having his own way. I thought you might like to hear that. He has even tried extravagant threats of disaffection, so you see he has *quite* come to the end of his arguments. They have decreed that he must retain the succession by lot for the heirs now alive, but it can be abolished by a present agreement between us all, for those yet unborn. In other words, uncle Karl's demise may be the last occasion for casting lots; after that, if we like, we can have primogeniture."

"Well, that would only be fair to you; but, then, supposing uncle Karl were to die within this year, as you may now not marry till twelve months after our father's death the lost chance would be lost for you and your children—at least, if I had a child. That, again, would *not* be fair to you, Konrad."

For a moment Konrad wondered whether his brother was really a better man than he. He decided that Egon's mind was either deeper or softer than his own.

"True," he said. "What is there on that island? A seminary?"

"Yes, that is San Giulio. Konrad, I am quite willing that primogeniture should replace this absurd lottery system. Only, then, in any case, you must have your chance as well as I."

"Whatever is he aiming at?" thought Konrad.

"Of course I do not like what you have told me about uncle Karl's will. Not so much on account of the money, although that ought to go with the estate, as because of the injustice and unkindness of the thing. But uncle Karl is not responsible to me for his actions. You can tell him that I consent to the proposed change in the entail, but that he must then obtain a modification of the clause which forbids you to marry till next September."

"You are generous, Egon."

"No; I try to be just."

"Uncle Karl will most certainly refuse. He has an idea that discussing the possibility of his dying within a year is equivalent to signing his death-warrant. You can't dispute about matters of that kind: 'tis a question of sentiment. The old boy is as superstitious as a nurse, and as nervous about death as a doctor. He'd cancel his new will if I were to hint at his decease to him."

"No man has a right to forbid another man to marry at any time."

"Well, the other man can wait?"

"True, but if he couldn't wait, it would be——"

"What?"

"A crime to make him." Both brothers were busy, for a moment, with their thoughts.

Then Konrad laughed. "You should have seen his rage!" he said; "it was too funny. They persisted in talking to him about his probable demise within a twelve-month, his age, and his gout, and the chances pro and con. He used to come home and abuse me. Lord! it's no joke, I can tell you—looking after uncle Karl!"

"I found that out at Monte Carlo," answered Egon.

"But he was wildest of all when you wrote and reminded him of his promise to send you Hans! I do believe he'd have semi-forgiven you, but for your cheek in doing that."

"It wasn't cheek. He had promised, and I needed Hans in this house. Besides, I had heard that the poor fellow was eating out his heart at home."

"'Tis the last thing of mine he shall have,' says uncle Karl. 'Send it him, and prepay the carriage!'" Konrad laughed again softly, rubbing his hands. "Even then, if Hans had been sensible, you'd never have got him."

"How so?"

"Oh, I don't know. Ask Hans. He certainly looks brighter than he did up at Rheyna. Some fishermen never can understand that there's more than one fish in the sea!"

"He will get over his wife's death in time. It is only six months ago, and they were not married more than nine."

"I suppose he will. What a strange process that 'getting over it' must be. I can understand indifference by experience, and despair by comparison, but how queer a man must feel half-way." Konrad had caught a fly; he

meditatively pulled out both its wings and placed it, in the sunlight, on the little table beside him.

"Konrad, I wish you would not do that."

"Why? Do you know, I like pulling out the wings of flies. I figure to myself that I am a gay lady, and that the flies are men."

"But I wish you wouldn't do it here. I—I don't like it." Egon crushed the little crawling thing against the table. "Think what our father would have said, had he seen you!"

"He would have said," remarked Konrad, looking at the stain on the metal surface: "'Life is a beautiful thing under all circumstances. We have no right to deny it to any creature.' Is that the carriage coming round? Dorothea promised to drive me to Baveno, to see the Isola Bella."

"It is quite time you started, then. We shall have to dine late."

"You don't mind?"

"Mind? No. Dorothea knows I am absolutely indifferent as to all her household arrangements."

"Excepting when you care," said Dorothea, who had come out on the steps. She took the reins of her brisk little ponies and drove off with her brother-in-law in the jingling basket-chair.

"You drive well," said Konrad presently. "I suppose you ride?"

"Oh no," answered Dorothea.

"Not at all?"

"I have given it up—Egon, you understand"—she flicked her whip—"it would be too sad for Egon."

"You will resume it," he answered coolly.

They drove past the quarries of the Motterone, round to the full wideness of the vaster lake. The Lago Maggiore opened, immense, before them, with the islands dotting its western bay towards Pallanza and the snow-capped Alps. They drove through that land of smiling autumn—and yet more radiant spring, which everyone nowadays "knows," as only tourists know. That, by the way, is the new, peculiar railway acquaintance of everyone with everything. All have "seen" the face of the earth, as the crowd sees a queen go by.

At Baveno they crossed with Dorothea's favourite boatman to that strange, half-finished palace of the Borromei, so splendid, so squalid, like a symbol of Italy; on the

terraces of the Isola Bella they wandered through the gardener's weary denomination of the plants which everyone who cares to recognised before he spoke.

They were standing on one of the topmost terraces, among the oranges and comic statues, when voices which had long been audible rang so clearly close by them that both turned with astonishment and simultaneous recognition.

"Madame de Roden!" exclaimed an Italian voice: a distinguished-looking old gentleman stood bowing to the ground. In a moment the whole party were around them, Signor Pini, one or two others, amongst whom Lord and Lady Archibald Foye.

"What a coincidence!" cried Konrad. But he overdid things. Without any cause for suspicion, Dorothea caught the strange accent in his voice.

"We are fortunate, indeed," said Signor Pini. "Permit me to present to Madame de Roden the Countess Pini-Pizzatelli, my wife!"

A dark Italian woman, with dazzling white complexion and dreamy eyes, dressed in a lot of guipure and a bunch of crimson roses, extended to Dorothea a languid but beautiful hand.

"You did not, then, know I was married?" said Pini, with a long-drawn smile, "yet I sent you a 'lettre de faire part.'"

"Black-edged, with 'In Memoriam,'" put in Archibald, with his happy knack of saying the wrong thing at the right time.

"We have been travelling," said Dorothea, "and for the last fortnight we have been buried out of sight in a villa on the Lake of Orta."

"And we, for the last three weeks, have been on *this* side of the mountain, in the Palazzo 'Arriet yonder, above Baveno. What will you? It is a hideous name for a house in Italy. The house also is hideous, Anglo-Moorish, Franco-Gothic, but it was the best we could get—the Palazzo 'Arriet!" He pointed to a great big modern red-brick mansion, a mess of northern money on the green Italian slope.

"But now, see! the honeymoon is ended, and now, lest my dear one bore herself—eh, Giulietta?—our friends come to keep us company. Lady Archibald is too kind."

"Don't you talk French about Lady Archibald," interposed the latter lady in English. "Ch'ai bas gonfiance."

The Italian countess turned slightly towards the Kellnerin, and a little wave of contempt curled the ends of her full red lips.

They went down the marble steps, and seemed naturally to split up into groups, Konrad and Lady Archibald lagging behind.

"Your father also has promised to come, with Mrs. Sandring," continued Pini; "of that fact you were probably aware?"

"No—I have not heard from them recently; I thought they were at Monte Carlo."

"Not yet, nor we. One must not exaggerate things. Your father and I are the only people, I flatter myself, who have ever won money at Monte Carlo by a system——"

"Oh, I say," interrupted Archie, "there was——"

"My dear lord, let me finish my sentence. I was going to say 'and who have known when to leave off.' My system works admirably, but one must not overdo it. Of course there is always one immense risk—one in a thousand—sooner or later it would turn up and destroy all. One must not tempt fate: I never play longer than three weeks at a time." He pushed on, with Dorothea, to the shingle, against which their boats lay grating. "What say you of my wife?" he asked hastily, "is she not charming? She is of my own compatriots, of Naples, a Contessina Brecci—ah, much has happened since we parted: I have seen again my fatherland—do you know, there were good things about the old régime!—we were married in the summer: is she not lovely? There is not much difference of age between us; just enough, as it should be. Yes, she is charming, you are very right! And she adores me."

Dorothea had said nothing. He held out his hand to assist her. "She is Venus," he whispered, bending over it. "And you are the Madonna. Of you I was not worthy. It is best as it is." He looked over his shoulder. "Giulietta, it was Madame de Roden who said to me that one should marry amongst one's own people, and now, see, she has chosen a foreigner."

"Monsieur de Roden is a lucky man," said Giulietta listlessly. But at this there was a shout of laughter, for she had turned to Konrad. Archibald especially distinguished himself by much skipping and shrieking, as he leaped, with loud bangs, from one boat to another, much to the disgust of the boatmen, and was heard, between the

bangs, to be ejaculating shrill O Lords! and Great Scotts!

"But who, then, is this renowned Scotchman to whom Archibald ever makes allusion?" cried his spouse, in fierce question which nowhere found response. "Archibald, come forth at once from the funny, or Herr Konrad will give you a beating."

"Hold hard," said Lord Archie, in sullen tones, silenced and saddened, as he came skulking ashore.

"Who? Herr Konrad? He cannot. He saith he must skidaddle with his sister-in-laws."

At dinner Egon inquired about the Countess Pini.

"Is she pretty?"

"No, I should not say so," replied Dorothea.

Konrad looked from one to the other. "Tastes differ," he said, laughing, "and a woman's opinion of women is never a man's."

"Why? *Is* she pretty, Konrad?" asked Dorothea.

"Egon had better find out for himself," replied the gentleman addressed.

"Well, perhaps she is, in a southern way. But she seemed to me to be half asleep."

"She will awaken," said Konrad.

CHAPTER X.

"*Lei è stanco, signore?*" said a smooth voice behind Egon von Roden, who was staggering along the dust-laden road between Orta and Gravellona. He had heard the carriage coming swiftly behind him, had turned with vain hope that it might be an empty fly—the horses were close upon him, two spanking bays with a jingle of brilliant harness, smart liveries, a deep up-to-date victoria.

Immediately the words were repeated in French. The occupant of the carriage bent forward and continued swiftly:

"But see, the question needs no asking! You are tired. Come into this carriage. I am going to Orta."

"True, I am tired, madame. I am glad you asked; I am very grateful," he answered simply, and got in.

As they bowled along, he sank back for a moment and half-closed his eyes. Yes, he was exhausted: his attempted walk had proved even a greater failure than of late he had begun to fear. Ever since his mishap at Lugano the difficulty and suffering had increased. He looked aside at his companion, a handsome Italian, and wondered if Dorothea would have noticed his fatigue. But he forgot that, before this second accident, he had turned off—nay, almost resented—any allusion, on her part, to his infirmity.

"If you had not taken pity on me," he said, "I think I should have had to lie down by the road. Yet how few would have stopped their horses for a stranger!"

"Why? Surely everyone! Are you living at Orta? I am going to call there on a family named Roden. Do you know them?"

"My name is Roden. May I ask——"

She laughed merrily, to his surprise. It seemed as if a film sank away from her face and a sudden sun looked through. "I am the Countess Pini. Do you know—I will be frank!—I had my suspicions, when I stopped, that you might be Monsieur de Roden."

"Ah, yes, you recognised me!" he said, bitterly conscious of his limp.

"You are so exceedingly like your brother," she added eagerly, and Egon acquiesced in her kind intent. "My husband was unable to come to-day: he has gone with a party to Varallo, but I would not wait another twenty-four hours before calling on Madame de Roden! I was so pleased to make her acquaintance at the Isola Bella yesterday."

"The pleasure was hers," replied Egon mechanically; "but by a strange coincidence, she has also gone to Varallo to-day, to show my brother the Sacro Monte."

"Then nothing remains for me but to return!"

"Impossible! After coming all this way! The horses will have to rest, even if you should not care to do so. You must allow me to show you the hospitality of my house, as you have shown me that of your carriage."

"Very well," she said with indifference, and lay back suddenly listless again from head to foot. He sat watching her furtively, unable, at first sight, to make her out. Did she care about everything or nothing? He could not have said.

"That is the Villa Belrespiro," he said, rousing himself, "the white house yonder against the hill. Doesn't it look like a dove on the nest? We go up here. Oh, I see your coachman knows the way."

"Yes, he is from Toce. Have you also Italian servants?"

"A couple. How good they are!"

She was just alighting. Suddenly, again, the film passed away from her face, and the sun shone out.

"How nice of you to say that! It is, indeed, delightful to meet with a man who says nice things, simply because he means them." She walked away on to the terrace, which fills the whole level in front of the house—a white terrace with dark green shrubberies, and late geraniums hanging in clusters over the parapet.

Giulietta stood silent by this balustrade, looking steadfastly down upon the water, the beautifully rounded lake that slept beneath, a sapphire in a silver and emerald frame. Then she heaved an enormous sigh, and turned to gaze at the low white house with its pillared porticoes and loggias.

"Belrespiro!" she said. "Ah, this is exquisite! This is Italian! Je respire. Ouf!"

Her companion smiled. "You mock me," he said. "It is very modest. Yours, I am told, is the finest villa for miles around."

"The Palazzo 'Arriet? Mock you? Have you seen the Palazzo 'Arrietti?" Her big eyes were staring at him: they could laugh, right down somewhere in depths below. "You could not be happy at Belrespiro, and admire the Palazzo 'Arriet."

"You will have some tea?" he proposed.

"Tea! No, I am not ill. But you shall get me some fruit, if you will, and some cakes or biscuits. As you say, the horses must have a good rest: it is a very long drive." She sat down on a marble bench, while he went to give his orders. When he came back she was leaning her face on one hand, staring, staring at the landscape as if she would drink it in. "Do you know," she began eagerly, "I have never been north before. I know nothing of my own country, nothing but Naples! Is it not a beautiful country—the most beautiful country in all the world?"

"I am sure it is," he answered.

She rose. "Yes, I must rest: the horses must rest. I cannot help it; you must put up with me. Show me the house, inside. I should like to see it, inside."

"There is nothing much to see," he said, as he led her to the drawing-room windows. "We have taken it furnished, of course. It belongs to an Englishman of taste: he has furnished it with very great care." Egon always began by trying to ignore the existence of curios, which most people, as he knew, perfunctorily declare themselves anxious to examine. As a matter of fact, the villa contained the careful collectings of a wealthy and leisurely amateur. Egon had been enchanted with it at once, and spent long hours of solitude poring over its treasures. In the salon which they now entered, for instance, a bright room, all white and yellow, were to be found a couple of exquisite Florentine cabinets, some very good ebony furniture with graffiti, and a small but valuable collection of majolicas. Its chief beauty, however, was a Madonna and Child, white and blue glazed, over the mantelpiece, to which the Countess walked straight as she entered the room.

"A della Robbia!" she exclaimed. "Not genuine, surely? Why yes, it must be genuine." She turned to her host. "Luca, I am sure it is Luca. Monsieur de Roden, a-

Luca della Robbia, do you understand what that means? And you said there was nothing to see!"

"I did not know you would care," he answered with awkward pleasure. "There are one or two more things, if you like."

"Let me look at this 'first,'" she said. "Is it not beautiful! beautiful! I hope you don't want to talk art jargon about it!"

"What do you mean?" He laughed outright.

"Oh, about its being in his later manner, and all that sort of thing! I can see that for myself, thanks! We stayed a week at Florence on our way here: that was very good of Signor Pini." (She had not mentioned her husband's name till now, except just at first, to excuse his absence.) "I had never seen a della Robbia before we went there, but some of his best work, I am told, is in Apulia. Have you ever travelled in those parts?"

"No, I have never been south of Florence."

"And I have been nowhere! But one can travel in books. It is second best. I have travelled all my life in books. Now show me the 'faïences.' That surely isn't Italian, that ware with the metallic glitter over it? I never saw anything of the kind before."

"That is Moorish—Spanish-Moorish, you know—Granada," he explained, delighted. In a moment they were busy over the plates and platters, thoroughly enjoying themselves, both.

"I like this: I am very happy," she said, naïvely. "You must show me the remaining rooms some other day. I cannot endure seeing any more beautiful things in this one afternoon. Do not you dislike being rushed? What is this book on the table? May I look at your book?" She had already taken it up. "Leopardi? You read modern Italian? Leopardi?" But before he could answer, she put down the book again. "No, do not let us talk literature," she said with decision. "We do not yet know each other sufficiently. Especially not for Leopardi."

"They have put out the things on the terrace," he said, and so she walked out again, and sat down, and ate fruit.

"You have a long drive back," he said. "Won't you be bored—such a long distance alone?"

"Je ne m'ennuie pas: on m'ennuie," she quoted, poisoning a

purple fig between finger and thumb. "I have lived too much alone, amongst others, not to enjoy being alone, by myself. You understand that? And, besides, one of my greatest pleasures—my chief pleasure—is being driven along, without companions, very fast. Signor Pini has been good to me about that: he has given me a pair of excellent 'Juckers'; they flash, like lightning, along the roads. Then, when we rush along thus, I lie back and sleep in the carriage, sleep waking, with waking dreams. It is then I have my best thoughts, wonderful, beautiful thoughts sometimes, that others would laugh at!" Her eyes shone. "They come and they go: I could not remember. So much the better. Boats I detest. They creep till they give me the fidgets. I long to jump out and run across the slippery surface. Then I should go down, plump, and be drowned."

"Yes, you would be drowned. Please do not jump out of the boat, Madame."

"I shall not. Signor Pini would be too sorry. Do you know, it is pleasant to think that! Now I am going home. Would you send for the carriage?"

But before it had come round, Dorothea and Konrad were seen driving up the hill-side. They arrived in high spirits over their excursion. The walk was beautiful, the view a thing to remember, and up yonder they had met the party from the Palazzo 'Arriet, a delightful surprise.

"And did Lady Archibald find the distance not more than she could manage?" queried the Countess, whose eyes had again grown indolent behind their transparent veil. "She was very afraid it would prove too far for her."

"Well, she lagged behind a good deal on the way back," answered Dorothea. "But Konrad was very good-natured, and helped her along."

"Ah, indeed!" said Giulietta. "Well, I must most certainly be going now. I have had a charming afternoon, Monsieur de Roden: it has been so good of you! Madame, I hope we shall see each other often—I wish it were nearer! But we can always put you up for the night. It is a barrack, the Palazzo. At least, there is room!"

"Now, what do you think of her?" demanded Dorothea, as the Countess Pini was carried swiftly away.

"I think her charming," promptly responded Egon.

"Yes, but, am I right? am I wrong? is she pretty?"

"She is like an Æolian harp."

"That is poetical, but not a reply."

"As a matter of fact, I have never heard an Æolian harp, Dolly, but she is like one's idea of the thing. I believe they are unsatisfactory."

"Then you think her unsatisfactory?"

"Dolly, when you choose, you are painfully persistent. But of course you are interested in—how shall I call her?—the actual Mrs. Pini. Yes, I think her rather unsatisfactory."

"So do I."

"But intended, somehow and some day, to give very great satisfaction."

"I don't at all know what you mean, Egon."

He laughed and kissed her. "Nor do I," he said. "At least, not distinctly. We must go and see them as soon as we can. I wonder what she makes of Pini?"

"Money," replied Dorothea. "Jewels, dresses, horses, a Palazzo—that is what she makes out of Pini."

"You women are always so harsh to each other. Now I—I wonder what she makes of Pini!"

CHAPTER XI.

NEXT day Dorothea was tired, and the horses also preferred to stay at home. So, in the morning, Konrad dozed over a novel, and in the afternoon, accompanying his sister-in-law, he yawned up the hill at the back of the little town, to the Franciscan church and convent. He agreed that the groups in the chapels all the way up to the top were "hideous," and, once on the summit, he remarked that the view of the snow-clad Alps was beautiful. It was a pity there hung clouds over Monte Rosa. Was that Monte Rosa? Yes, it was a pity there hung clouds over Monte Rosa.

But it was not to say non-sweet nothings like this, that Konrad had obtained, through his uncle's assistance, the leave from his regiment, which had been in his thoughts all through the autumn manœuvres. On the following morning, as it happened, therefore, he had a note (it appears) from Lady Archibald to say that the Countess Pini had refused to go on an excursion, feeling certain that Madame de Roden would return her call in the afternoon.

This hint being rather unwillingly taken, the trio from Belrespiro turned up at the Palazzo 'Arriet—"Heriot," said the gilt letters on the gates, in accordance with the name of the late owner. This magnificent villa, which alas no longer exists, had such peculiarities as deserve more than a passing notice. Its gardens—by Gaiosi, of Milan—were noted for producing a maximum of colour, in a minimum of green. Seen from the water they look like an enormous Nürnberger Leb-Kuchen, or as if the bottom had fallen out from a baby-giant's kaleidoscope in Mars. The long, thick house itself possessed, on the outside, every hue of brick and marble hitherto discovered or invented, every form of pillar, arch, gable, and turret that has figured in the habitation of man, laboriously compiled and put together by an eminent architect from London. What the inside would be like, you saw as soon as you entered, for a broad crimson velvet ledge, with fringes, ran down the banisters,

along the monumental staircase. All the apartments were gilt and mosaic, with a good deal of plush, provided by Paris, and there was not a room in the mansion which did not immediately suggest an upholsterer's bill.

About all this, of course, there was nothing remarkable. In fact, in our days, when wealth has become a vulgarity, the Palazzo 'Arriet was commonplace.

But the house had another especial claim to distinction. From the beauty of its situation, and its size, it had been specially selected during many years as a fitting temporary residence for royalty. Emperors and queens, exotic and European, had graced the great villa by their presence, and embellished it with their memory. The latter lingered about its name in the country side, as the odour which clings to a rose when 'tis rotten. By an irony of fate, the Palazzo 'Arriet was also known as the Villa Reale, thus blending in mystic absorption two extremes which, indeed, have now fused into one. But the glorified owner had done more than this. Tablets on the outside walls, between all the windows, proclaimed, lettered in gold or white marble, the titles and virtues of the crowned splendours who had slept and died—aye, one had even condescended to die—here. Inside, all due worship continued, for this house was a temple of Royalty. Every bedroom contained the momentous marble inscriptions, recording what somebodies or nobodies had deigned to repose within its walls.

THIS CHAMBER WAS OCCUPIED FROM APRIL THE 27TH TO THE
2ND OF MAY, 1867, BY

HIS SERENE HIGHNESS
PRINCE AUGUSTUS OF BUNSWICK-SCHLUMPENBOTTEL,

WHO GRACIOUSLY DEIGNED TO PERMIT THAT
IT SHOULD BE NAMED, IN EVERLASTING MEMORY OF HIS VISIT,

"THE PRINCE'S APARTMENT."

But over this modest slab was a larger and louder tablet:—

ON THE 13TH OF NOVEMBER, 1879,
HER MAJESTY THE EMPRESS OF ALL THE
KAMSCHATKAS,

BEING ON A VISIT TO HER IMPERIAL COUSIN THE GRAND-DUCHESS
MARIA IVANOVNA (AT THAT TIME RESIDENT HERE),
SLEPT IN THIS APARTMENT, AND GRACIOUSLY SIGNIFIED HER PLEASURE
THAT IT SHOULD HENCEFORTH BE KNOWN AS

"HER MAJESTY'S ROOM."

Downstairs the subject was treated in a yet more personally interesting manner:—

ON THIS SOFA THE BEGUM OF BHOPAL WAS WONT TO REPOSE AFTER DINNER AND PARTAKE OF A CUP OF BLACK COFFEE, WHICH WAS SERVED IN THE SÈVRES "TASSE" NOW SHOWN IN THE GLASS CASE ABOVE, WHICH TASSE HAD ORIGINALLY BEEN GIVEN TO THE PROPRIETOR'S GRANDMOTHER BY HIS LATE LAMENTED MAJESTY KING GEORGE THE THIRD.

Such particularisation in the bedrooms might have led to comic effects it was highly desirable to avoid. The bedrooms, then, remained, in their tender and sacred reminiscences, beautifully vague. Only, each one of them still contained in a book-stand the few volumes once placed there by a pious hand. In every room, as you entered, you saw them: The Almanach de Gotha, two English "Peerages," the splendid Libro d'Oro of Italy, the Annuaire de la Noblesse, and of course, last and least, the Holy Bible, which teaches us respect of persons and also, most necessarily, tells us to honour the King.

It is a lamentable thought that all this grandeur has now been swept away. For the creator of it all, dying a widower bereft of sons, in his bitterness decreed the useless destruction of the building. Only the sort of inner sanctuary is left standing, which opened out of the central drawing-room, the small boudoir with the cupola, that contains all the busts and portraits ever made—and they were many—of the proprietor, his wife and sons. The ignorant peasantry believe the thing to be some kind of Protestant chapel: its doors are always locked, but you can see through the windows the work of "Timbs, R.A." They call it Sant 'Arrietta. Some day, perhaps, in the dim and cadless future, the place will be discovered as the relic of a bygone faith.

In this chamber, when it was yet one of many, Giulietta received her visitors.

"How kind of you to come so soon; I am glad that we happen to be in!" She spoke innocently. Dorothea, mindful of the missive, naturally wrote her down at once for a person you could not trust.

"Is not this a charming little room?" continued the Countess Pini. "You see it has six large windows all around it." She turned to Egon. "It is the only room in the house, in which you can imagine yourself to be outside!"

The others laughed, although she was perfectly serious. Archie, who had strolled in, said: "That's an original joke. I must write it down."

"How far have you got with your collection?" questioned his cousin, Dorothea.

"Why, you never get far or near, that's the worst of it. Of course you can go on for ever. But I've three quarto volumes ready in manuscript of three hundred pages each."

"For good fortune, you write very big!" remarked his wife. "Your writing, it sprawls like a giraffe that has suddenly sat down."

"What do you know?" exclaimed Archie furiously; "you never stick your nose into any of my books!"

"Well, that is your fault. When last I would ask you how was your copy-books, you answered me: 'Fool!'"

"You misapprehended me," replied Archie, gravely. "I said 'full.'"

She looked at him as a wife never should, before strangers. "There was a time," she said, "when that was amusing. It is long ago."

"Dickie!"

"Also was there a time when it made me very angry——"

"Lady Archibald!"

"—but that also is long ago. Come, Herr Konrad"—in German—"on the terrace, and I will show you the 'wunderschöne' view."

Archie watched her out of sight, and then, turning suddenly to Dorothea:

"Do whatever you like in a matrimonial way," he said, "only don't marry beneath you. It's the one practical joke that is bound to fail."

In the awkward silence, Dorothea, to break it, answered: "I haven't much chance!"

Archibald laughed boisterously. "Nonsense, you might still have a dozen chances," he said. He walked briskly beside her up the long-drawn drawing-room. "When I was a little boy, I used to put cobbler's wax on people's chairs. Lord, I've put it on my own heart, and that woman's sat down on it!"

"I am sure she is fond of you," said Dorothea kindly.

He did not hear her. "I used to think, before I married my Kellnerin, that married life'd be all beer and skittles," he went on. "By George, I've found that it's all beer and skittishness."

"Lady Archibald is very young," said Dorothea, feeling old; "but so are you. She is very bright."

He stopped, looked at her, and suddenly, speaking very fast:

"You're a good woman, by Jove, something like what my mother was. I don't think I've seen a good woman since they turned me out at home. It was a beastly shame to turn me out; I don't want to abuse the governor, but he ought to have accepted my wife. If he had, perhaps Dickie—— Never mind, it's no use now. Look here, I want to talk to you about it all; will you let me?"

"Yes," said Dorothea.

"Dickie doesn't behave as she ought to; you can see that; every one can see it. We're a sort of cousins, you and I. Shall we go and look at the roses? I want you to take her up, to talk with her—be kind to her, Madame de Roden, make her good, like yourself. She hasn't had your bringing up. She's all alone and stupid, and I'm not the sort of fellow to help her."

"But I don't quite understand," said Dorothea, much distressed, among the pale autumn roses. "Surely you are mistaken. Lady Archibald means no harm. Your influence——"

"My influence!" he burst in. "What am I but a tom-fool? When I speak seriously to her, she answers: 'Is it a pun?'—a 'pon' she calls it. 'Go, crack your pon,' she said to me only this morning, with Konrad standing by, and I know that to him she calls me 'Cracky.' He taught her that, d—— him; he taught her that!" He hissed out the last words with a vehemence that changed his good-natured face, as a dog's kind features harden when it rises to growl at a foe.

"I beg your pardon," he went on. "But I wish you would suggest to her somehow, as women can, to change her tone with gentlemen. There, I've said it. It's not a pleasant thing for a man to say. No joke, I can assure you." He gave a sad little laugh.

"I will do all I can, of that I do assure you," said Dorothea gravely. "And, to begin with, I want you not to exaggerate anything. Remember, as you said, that your wife has had little education. Remember that we all marry—how says your Prayer Book?—for better, for worse."

He ground his heel into a white "Thé Maréchal" on the

terrace. "It's a disgusting expression," he said, "I hate it. As well say at once that the whole thing's a toss-up." And as Pini came toward them at that moment, Lord Archibald walked bravely up the terrace, humming with a very loud hum :

"Heads or tails, she's bound to win,
Tommy Dodd, Tommy Dodd!"

"I am hoping," said Pini, with his usual bows and waves of the delicate fingers to and fro from his breast, "that Madame de Roden will do us the immense honour and favour of coming to dine here to-morrow, and stay over-night? Why not stay for a day or two? The distance is far too great for occasional visits. Your husband has already consented, madame—all our hope is now centred in you!"

Archibald's appealing look drew the "yes" from Dorothea's lips, even while she realised that here was an opportunity, providentially offered, of doing the good she desired.

"We will go and tell them," cried Pini, perhaps really delighted. "See, they are over yonder, talking of many things that, frankly, do not interest me at all. So I came away to ask you. Dear Madame de Roden, I desire nothing better than that you should be a friend to my wife."

On the way home Dorothea sang, as far as was reasonable, the praises of Archie, recalling his good-nature, his easy uprightness, his general desire to do nobody any harm.

"Oh yes, he's not half bad," said Konrad, "so, to use his own manner of speaking, 'tis his better half that I prefer. But a man whose whole life is a quibble would madden the mildest of wives."

"Nonsense, every hobby has its uses," put in Egon. "He told me that an eminent professor of philology had written to him, entreating him to bequeath his international library of humour to the British Museum. He was delighted at that. He almost wept at the idea of being humorously useful after his death."

"He will be humorously useful before," answered Konrad savagely. "He belongs to the category of husbands that are!"

CHAPTER XII.

"Put up what I want, Hans," said Egon.

"You want such a lot," replied Hans.

"Well, people do."

"They didn't when I was young," grumbled Hans.

"Rubbish! You are not yet thirty."

"Well, all I mean to say is, that a few years ago gentlemen could spend a couple of days with their friends without needing mountains of luggage."

"All right. Don't forget my white ties, as you did last time."

"I only forgot them once," said Hans.

"Good Lord, did you want to get into the habit? The truth is, you are a very bad valet, Hans."

"Thank you, sir," said the immovable servant, folding up trousers. "Would you mind telling me what you wish to take?"

"Again? Very well. This—and this——"

The servant dodged. "If you'd mind, sir, not shying it all over the place."

"What made you come to me as valet?"

"What made you order me to come, sir?"

"Well, for one thing, how ever did you get away from my uncle? Tell me, Hans, I'm curious. What did he say?"

Hans stood to attention, with an ivory hair-brush in each hand.

"Well, it was in this way," he said. "There came a telegram to Rheyna one night from the Herr Graf at Berlin, and I was to start for the city next morning. I was a bit flurried, for I'd never been away from home before, excepting for my military service in Munster, and Munster isn't much of a city neither. There's too many houses in Berlin: that can't be right. God can't have intended men to put so many houses together, or He'd have made the country smaller. I wonder they who live in the middle don't choke."

"Well, go on; we can't alter that just now. And don't leave off packing." Egon threw some more things in a heap.

"You're crumpling your shirts, sir," said Hans. "Well, up I came, and found the house on the Pariser platz, and it cost me a lot of trouble. I asked three different passers-by to tell me, and each of them told me wrong. The Berlin people may be very clever, but they don't know their right hand from their left." And Hans slapped a coat with much conviction.

"That has always been a weakness with the inhabitants of great cities," said Egon, increasing, rather at haphazard, the pile on the floor. "You remember it was said of the population of Nineveh, Hans, in Jonah's time."

"Jonah was the person that came out of the whale, sir?"

"Yes."

"Well, no wonder that distracted the Ninevehs, sir. I saw many strange things in Berlin, but nothing quite as strange as that."

"You found my uncle at last: what then?"

"Yes, I found him, in a very big room, in a very big chair, with a very big foot. He was very cross. I suppose, because he had the gout."

"Or, perhaps, on account of this business of yours?"

"Or, perhaps, on account of this business of yours," replied Hans imperturbably. "He looked at me with a look that sent my heart into my mouth. 'Art thou a fool or art thou not?' he says. Now, what could I answer? Of course, I am a fool, but I wouldn't tell my lord Count that."

"Hullo!" cried Egon, turning from a cupboard, "you've got that wrong. Say it as you mean it, Hans?"

The servant grinned. "Of course I'm not a fool, but I couldn't tell my lord Count that! So 'I leave it to your Excellency, Herr Graf,' I said, very respectful like. 'No, thou shalt decide once for all,' he says——" But here the man abruptly broke off, turning purple, as he bent over a pile of underwear. "So the story ends, and you see, I came here."

"Ends! What do you mean? How did you decide it?"

"By proving myself a 'd——d, idiotic, hopeless fool of a conceited idiot.' Those were his Excellency's own words, as I well remember. His Excellency spoke them very clearly, and I said: 'Your Excellency, then, is content that an idiot should leave your service.' And so I came away."

"But what was the question that——"

"If you wish me to get ready with the packing, I fear you must leave me, sir."

Egon, knowing that he would get nothing more out of the man, was moving towards the door, when the other immediately recalled him.

"Begging your pardon, sir, but may I ask a question? Is the French maid to go with us to the villa over there?"

"Of course she accompanies her mistress."

"And is she to go back with us later to Germany?"

"Probably."

"So, then, she's a fixture in this family! Not a temporary thing, like an hotel."

"I suppose not. We don't usually look upon our servants as temporary—till they go, Hans."

The man stood still over his open portmanteau, and solemnly shook his head.

"A Frenchwoman in a German family!—it isn't natural, sir."

Egon waited, suppressing all smiles.

"You know what is best, sir, of course!"—this was spoken in a tone of perfect incredulity—"and I shouldn't venture to express an opinion, but I shouldn't like it to be known at Rheyna that we had a Frenchwoman living with us, like this."

"How about my uncle's French cook?"

"A man in the kitchen isn't a maid in the parlour," replied Hans. "I *have* heard told, though of course you know these things better, that a Frenchwoman"—Hans's voice dropped to a whisper—"who was with the late Empress Augusta, used to tell all Bismarck's secrets to the great Napoleon!"

"Well, we haven't any secrets here."

"Noble families always have secrets. And it don't, as I say, seem natural, a Frenchwoman spying about the Rodens. I don't think his Majesty 'd like it, if he knew!"

"His Majesty! Why not say at once that God in Heaven disapproves?"

"Well, the two are near each other," answered Hans sedately. "But his Majesty never made a Frenchwoman, and God did, so I think there's a difference there!"

Leaving Hans the last word, as he had done for a dozen years, Egon went in search of Konrad. It may be noted

here that this master of course addressed his henchman as "thou," and that Hans, in his answers, would multiply titles, which national characteristics, however, are better ignored where they cannot be given in the original.

"Konrad, what did uncle Karl offer Hans to induce him to stay at Rheyna?"

Konrad lifted his lazy eyes off "Pot-Bouille." "Why don't he tell you himself?" said Konrad. "He is a fool, as uncle told him—too great a fool to know which side his bread is buttered, and even too great a fool to tell you that he scraped off the butter for your sake."

"So I thought. Yes, he is a fool, as you say."

"Uncle Karl declared that his royal word was pledged, but that, of course, it might happen that the man refused to go. If he stayed, there also chanced to be a keeper's cottage open, and any of the girls on the place whom he liked to select, uncle Karl undertook should accept him. But Hans said he didn't want another wife, and uncle kicked him downstairs."

"And across to me," said Egon. "How the poor old man must hate me."

"Well, yes, he does," answered Konrad. "Have you ever read this? It's rather good. Lady Archie lent it me. She's taught herself a lot of French, she says, by working right through Zola."

On his way back into the house, Egon met Dorothea. He stopped her. "You are sure you like to go to these people?" he asked. "Because you know, as I said before, there's no earthly reason why you should go and stay with Pini, unless you want to."

"Yes, I should like to; I should like to," she answered nervously. "I want to go very much, Egon." And she passed him rather hastily, in her painful resolution of going to speak with Konrad.

"Eh?—oh, ah, yes," said Konrad, glancing up again from his book. It would be wrong to say, that, in his courtesy, he looked bored.

"Konrad, I want to speak to you about Lady Archibald." Dorothea was absurdly agitated: her colour came and went.

A quick spasm passed through Konrad's leaden face. "What of her?" he asked coldly.

"I am sure she does not mean the slightest harm."

"Of course not. Has she done any?"

"And, you see, she is very young."

"I suppose she is, compared to you," said Konrad, but his sneer looked exactly like a smile.

"And husbands are so unreasonable," said Dorothea, trying to be sprightly.

"I am sorry, but not surprised, that you should find yours so."

"And, I think, we must admit, Konrad, that she has not quite our reserve, our education. She can't help it, poor thing, but she is a little—how shall one say?—*outrée*, is she not? Don't you think, that we all ought to help her?"

"Would you tell me quite clearly what you mean to insinuate?" There was a twang about the last word; his nerves were beginning to vibrate under the strain of uncertainty, how much she knew or had guessed.

She looked at him in amazement, and he quickly caught the look. She knew nothing, then: his annoyance relaxed.

"I don't want to insinuate anything," said Dorothea. "All I want is to suggest quite openly, that we should all help Lady Archibald to assume her new position—to find her place. She must forget that she ever was a Biermädcl. You men can help her much more than we."

Konrad scowled. "My dear Dorothea, how good of you!" he cried. "How kind you are! You women always see each others' shortcomings so much more quickly, and it is so nice of you to try and improve your acquaintances. Yes, certainly, Lady Archibald must be made to accept her new position! You are quite right! I will help you all I can."

She looked at him a little doubtfully, anxious to feel grateful.

"*Touche-là!*" cried Konrad, holding out his hand. "You and I together, we must see what we can make of Lady Archibald!"

Then she took his hand, and said: "Thank you," and went gravely indoors.

A few hours later she was sitting in a gorgeous bedroom of the Palazzo 'Arriet (furnished entirely by Elderwood of London)—the "Pocahontas," as people called it, for, saith the inscription over the portal:

THIS TABLET PRESERVES THE MEMORY OF THE
INDIAN PRINCESS POCAHONTAS,

WHO DIED HERE OF SMALLPOX ON HER TWENTIETH BIRTHDAY.

N.B.—The Apartment was thoroughly Disinfected by Messrs. Collings and Collings, the well-known Sanitary Engineers.

Dorothea had chosen the room among several which Pini offered her: it possessed the finest view.

"You are not, then, afraid?" exclaimed the astonished Italian, whose whole life was one mass of superstition, belief in the jettatura, in omens, amulets, card-laying, all a Neapolitan's dread of misfortune, and a gambler's chase after luck.

"Afraid? No," replied Dorothea. "Not after Collings and Collings!"

Her hostess, who, till now, had appeared pretty well to ignore her existence, seemed suddenly to hear what she said. "I like you," declared Giulietta. "You are not a fool."

In this haunted chamber, then, sat Dorothea, having her hair dressed before dinner by Aurélie Bompard. Mademoiselle Aurélie was cheerfully impressed by once more finding herself, in this servants' hall of the palazzo, amongst what she considered fitting surroundings.

"The valet of Monsieur," said Aurélie, "remains ridiculously inadequate. It is painful to find oneself thus escorted amongst strangers."

"He is such a good man," said Dorothea.

"That, if Madame will pardon me, is not a desirable quality in a valet. I have known many, and of the most superior, but a good man among them was there none."

"And how about maids?" asked the mistress.

"With maids it is different; women have always religion. They are not divided, like men. But a virtuous valet, or a virtuous cook—no, the thing is unreasonable! Good cookery, also, and religion, they do not go together. It is like a coachman! If I were a great lady, I would not desire a coachman that stole not, nor a man-cook that drank not, nor a valet that did not make love."

"But this poor fellow is a broken-hearted widower?"

Mademoiselle Aurélie shrugged her shapely shoulders. "And that, is it not absurdest of all? For what else are the hearts of widowers broken but that they seek glue?"

"Aurélie, you should not talk like that: it is sinful."

"Ah, the droll word!" Aurélie laughed merrily. "Pardon, but when Madame says 'sinful,' I cannot but laugh. With us others it is the word of the curé only, and he says it, that we pay him, for penance. It is part of his stock-in-trade. To me it is, on Madame's lips, as if I heard her speak Latin, like in church!"

Dorothea gave a hopeless sigh, and (as constantly with Aurélie) her thoughts reverted to Rebecca.

"Madame is too good," continued the maid. "I love Madame so much I would almost permit myself to say it is a mistake to be so good, at least, in a Protestant! In our religion Madame would have gone into a cloister and been happy. That is the only way to keep oneself unspotted from the world." (Dorothea started involuntarily.) "But now Madame will get speckled and spickled all over, and be miserable. To me it is as if I saw the soul of Madame, in a white satin dress and a long tail, dragging about the streets of Paris all under the omnibus dirt!"

The maid's shrill voice had taken on a tone of real feeling. Almost tenderly she smoothed out the folds of Dorothea's dinner gown.

"I feel a responsibility towards Madame, for Monsieur le Colonel entrusted her to me," said Aurélie. "'My daughter is like an angel from Heaven,' said the Colonel, 'that fell out, with the others, by mistake! Look after her, thou who knowest the ways of the children of Lucifer.' But how can I?" Mademoiselle Bompard threw out both her hands to her mistress in open appeal. "Madame is to me like the dove in the ark, of which she read last Sunday. No wonder it returned not, poor beast, when once it had escaped from that menagerie!"

For Dorothea had undertaken laborious Sunday readings with Mademoiselle Bompard. A half-hour of early devotion was thus weekly endured, by the maid with amused toleration, by the mistress with unwilling fortitude. Dorothea was not of those who enjoy preaching to their neighbours or doing them good against their desire. And she realised to herself the unsatisfactoriness of religious instruction, in which the teacher's chief hope was that the pupil should not listen, or, at any rate, not speak. For Mademoiselle Aurélie's shrewd suggestions were terribly disconcerting and often irresistibly comic. Dorothea, it must be admitted, had no active desire to convert her to Protestantism. But she had been startled out of her indifference as to her maid's spiritual condition by the discovery of abysses of ignorance such as would have been simply unthinkable at Brodryck. For, one morning, at Lugano, she had casually remarked: "You are as hard to convince as Sarah," and Mademoiselle Aurélie had answered: "C'était une ancienne femme-de-chambre à Madame?" Next Sunday Dorothea had seated herself down, with the smart, solemnised, twinkly maid in front

of her, and had read aloud the story of the Promise of Isaac:

"That sort of thing wouldn't suit our *Parisiennes* a bit," said Aurélie at the close, with great emphasis. She had sat listening, in an atmosphere of thoughtful silence that terrified her mistress, through half-a-dozen faltering remarks by the latter on the late reward of Abraham's faith. "Heavens, they could never be sure they were safe! Poor—what was her name?—Sarah; it certainly was hard on her. But there, men always look at these matters from their selfish point of view."

Whatever Dorothea did Aurélie's standpoint remained the same: "*Elle est trop bonne. Je suis inquiète.*" This she repeated over and over again in the letters she wrote herself of evenings, when waiting up. For this discreetest of maids, in her need of expansion and her fixed resolve not to trust any secrets to correspondence or even to diaries, wrote herself nightly pages of letters about all the private affairs of her families, and tore them up invariably before blowing out her candle. "*Ça me soulage,*" she said.

On this first evening of her stay at the Palazzo 'Arriet she wrote, among other things: "Of one thing I am secure: for the present we are safe. And, after all, I have obtained my object, which was to be free in the future from feminine intrigues. Ah, what have I not seen of these latter! Of them I am utterly weary. And, if Dorothea live to be sixty and beautiful as Ninon, she will never make love, the dear one, where priests sing not chorus: Amen! That is the essential. And I am too old (thirty) for further emotions. As for Egon, he will of course do as all men in time, but for that I care not, nor will she, if I am there to advise her. I have never seen man that was otherwise, in *our* world, excepting the little Duque d'Ijisqua, and his marriage was declared void in the Court of Rome!

"The little Italian is not as sleepy as she looks.

"As for Konrad and the Kellnerin, *je m'en fiche.*"

While the maid sat thus penning ephemeral wisdom upstairs, the mistress moved about the drawing-room and tried to be happy. Dorothea was annoyed with herself for not enjoying her surroundings, nor did she realise, as Aurélie could have told, that her discomfort was caused by the succession of spots which splashed from the conversation around her across a soul whose home-nurtured innocence

only dogma disproved. Konrad and the Biermädel chose, for reasons of their own, to be outrageous, in German, telling stories of their common acquaintances, which proved them to be common indeed. Egon could only kick his brother under the table, nor could he even do that, for, having mistaken his leg, he inflicted continuous punishment upon Archie, who did not understand German, and lived under the impression that his wife's uproarious laughter was aimed at himself. At last came a specially bold anecdote, a specially loud peal, and an extra hard kick; then the long-suffering Archie protested: "I say," he demanded, "who's kicking me? Shut up!"

"I kicked," began Egon desperately; but he stopped, for the story had been Lady Archibald's.

"One at a time, please," said poor Archie, with a fierce scowl at Konrad. The boy would have joked on the rack.

As for Pini, he enjoyed eating his dinner and paying pretty compliments. Giulietta contemned every duty of a hostess, lying about on sofas and waking to occasional animated scraps of conversation about individual subjects with favourites few and far between.

In the smoking-room Egon walked up to Konrad. "I wish you would avoid saying things you might know my wife doesn't like to hear!"

Konrad looked at him, smiling. "Very natural," he answered, "and I hope that you'll always avoid doing them."

"What do you mean? Do you mean anything?"

"No, oh no. Fine woman, Giulietta! She seems to have taken a fancy to you."

"Yes, she is handsome," said Egon.

Their host came between them. "If there is one thing I regret," said Pini, "it is that I never learnt German. A language abounding in good stories, it appears! Many of them, I presume, cannot bear translating? Eh? Like Lord Archibald's 'pons'?" He turned inquiringly to Konrad, who coloured at the lesson.

"Let us sit down," continued the courteous Italian quickly. "Yes, my dear Roden, the house is good enough. Giulietta dislikes it, but that is a pretty woman's whim. To me it is singularly appropriate: it represents the money of to-day!"

"How do you mean?" questioned Egon.

"Well, the Borromean islands, for instance; they represent

the money of yesterday—a Paradise of art and nature, erected, as you know, on bare rocks by princes whose every thought was princely. Nowadays, of course, we have the Palazzo 'Arriet. It is very comfortable. The drainage is absolutely perfect. As for the money of to-morrow, there will be nothing left to buy with it, now that beauty is dead and comfort is cheapening fast. Pray God in the future there may be no money!"

"What, you say that!" cried Archie. "You a Socialist? By gum!"

Pini looked at him, indifferently. "We are all Socialists nowadays," said the old man; "that is to say, we all want those who have more than we to have less, and those who have less than we to get more, without any inconvenience to ourselves. Yes, we all feel that would be better. And we all know that money is a curse. But I—I was a Socialist at twenty. I have been poor all my life. I loathe money."

The three young men stared at him incredulously.

"Do not stare at me like that," said Pini irritably, and he poured himself out a thimbleful of green Chartreuse. "It is true. I have been poor all my life, after twenty early years of luxury—what care I? Nothing. I had lost money for a good cause: I was glad. I have gained it now also in a good cause: it is well!"

"A good cause?" inquired Konrad, with his faintly sneering smile.

"I will tell you, if you care," continued Pini, addressing Egon. "Ah, Santa Madre!" and suddenly he seemed to drop into the tone he had used before fortune favoured him. "But no, you are Protestants all!—amazing fact: my house is full of Protestants, and with you it is faith, not works! I, when I settled myself to give lessons in Nice—it was Monte Carlo, Monte Carlo, with my pupils from morning to night. Within me awoke, I will admit it, the gambling instinct that sleeps in all our blood. But it was not that only, not chiefly—the obsession came upon me to discover the great secret, to conquer the place! I played not; I but went to study. In my spare time—ahimé, there was enough of it!—in the night-time did I ever reflect, reflect! Daily I prayed to the Virgin, to the saints! I lit candles!—but, no, you would not understand! The candles were small and rare, Santa Madre! but thou tookest the widow's mite!"

He sank his fine old face on his breast in a pose which would have been purely reverent but for an admixture of elegance, that yet certainly was not affectation.

"Well, after many years of hard labour and hope—faith *with* works, as our Holy Church enjoins—I am almost successful. I am returning to complete my task. There is still always the small risk of the ten—it will go," he cried aloud with sudden energy, "it will go! Then, when the system is complete, I shall have gained my object in view." He looked from one young man to the other. Egon was interested, Konrad amused, Archie asleep.

"I will make no secret. Why should I?" He spoke in a burst of after-dinner expansiveness. "I have gained, not the fabulous sums that were named in the newspapers, but a couple of hundred thousand francs. Well, that is enough for a season, enough to spend here! But now I am returning for the final combat. If I conquer, when I have gained enough for this wife of mine, enough for definite luxury—a fortune for both of us, then—I make known my secret to the world!"

He had risen, flinging his cigarette on to the wood fire. The three men stared at him. Archie had woken up.

"Never!" cried Archibald. "You'd make a company, organise capital, gain millions, stop the place! But you can get millions out of 'em before they shut up shop."

"Yes, I shall stop the place!" answered Pini, his eyes fixed thoughtfully on the lamp. "When my system is perfect, I give it to the world. It is thus I can pray to the Virgin. She helpeth not a gambler; niente affatto. She helpeth a philanthropist. In a year, by her aid, I shall have destroyed Monte Carlo. Only the ten still remains."

He held open the door, and, again addressing Egon only: "Shall we join the ladies? Meanwhile my life is a curse to me. Even here they have found me—the endless besiegers, reporters, fortune-hunters, beggars—never am I at rest! Yonder, at Monte Carlo, it was frightful. In self-defence I shall tell them my secret, when I have it, and then there will be no more roulette!"

"Just so," said Konrad, looking up. "There will be the more trente et quarante."

"I do not think so," said Pini, annoyed.

"They will lower it to five francs at once."

"They will never get the masses to play 'trente et quarante,'" answered Pini, quickly disappearing towards the

staircase. Konrad vexed him. When a man displays an honest ambition, only the cruel or the silly disturb his dreams. It is in the power of none of us to do well: at least let us honour the few who occasionally want to.

The ladies were scattered over the too large drawing-room and the dusk-hid terrace. It is noticeable that when the sexes separate after dinner, the men's tongues grow looser, while the women's lag. The reason is not hard to discover. For men, when not intimate, have always one subject in common: women. But women, unless intimate, cannot discuss men.

Giulietta, after one glance around, had curled herself up on a sofa. A couple of insignificant Italian cousins, poor relations, with jewellery, sat at a side-table, playing a Neapolitan card-game. Lady Archibald had gone out on to the terrace, and stood yawning, in the soft star-bespangled night.

Then Dorothea seized hold of her beating heart in both her hands, and pressed it hard.

A moment later she was out on the terrace, in the rich Southern odour of roses and oranges, with the play of the great cool lake, amid its thousand lights, beneath.

"Lady Archibald," she said.

"Ah? Are you there? Dear me, I thought it was Giulietta. Come out of that big gaunt room, my dearest Madame von Roden? Is it not beautiful? See, that is Pallanza yonder."

Dorothea stood silent, praying for wisdom.

"You do not care for Pallanza? Well, nor do I. But we must try to amuse ourselves until the men come back."

"Lady Archibald——"

"Yes, that is my name, dear Madame von Roden. It used to amuse me immensely at first. But I have got used to it, even as to all things, even as to Archie."

"What a good fellow he is, so kind-hearted, and he seems devoted to you."

"Eh?—yes. You are a kind of cousin of his, are you not? Then why don't you call me 'Dickie,' so I could call you 'Doll'?"

"I will, if you like," said Dorothea, mentally shuddering.

"Oh, I don't mind. I am glad you like Archie. Poor Archie!"

"Why poor Archie?"

"I'm sure I don't know, if you don't."

"Well, I think I do know. I don't think he seems

happy. I am sure he loves you very much, Lady—Dickie. You alone can make him happy, and you alone can make him miserable."

"How interesting," said Dickie.

"It is a terrible responsibility for us women, don't you think so?" continued Dorothea timidly. "When our husbands love us, we hold the whole of their happiness in the hollows of our hands!"

"Don't you think that is a little—outré?" said Lady Archibald meaningly, but the shaft missed fire.

"And I think it ought to make us very careful, don't you? Especially in our intercourse with other men. Often, when we mean nothing, these silly, jealous husbands are perfectly miserable. There was a man lived in our neighbourhood whose wife used to attract all sorts of attention. Too much, I admit. He never complained to her, they say, and one day he shot himself."

"Don't you think that was rather—outré?" asked Lady Archibald. She stood by the balustrade, immensely interested in the far lights of Pallanza. No, that cannot have been a ripple in her throat. It must have been a rustle through the orange trees.

Dorothea paused, vaguely disconcerted.

"You do not like flirtations, then?" asked Dickie.

"No, they would not amuse me, if meaningless——"

"Indeed!"

Dorothea flushed crimson in the half-light. "And other than meaningless," she added almost haughtily, "I cannot imagine their occurring!"

Lady Archibald slapped her soundly on the nearest bare shoulder. "Right you are, old girl," she said (in equivalent German), "I like to see you riled. It does me good. Fire away, Doll! Teach your poor cousin what's what! Give her lessons in virtue. Tell her she must forget that she ever was a Biermädel. Help her to assume her natural place!"

The references thus poured down on Dorothea's head could no longer miss hitting her in the face. She understood that her whole conversation with Konrad had, through him, reached the woman she was burning to help. She drew herself up, and it seemed to the rather frightened Dickie that, as she expressed it afterwards, the creature began to grow.

"Shall we go in?" said Dorothea. "That is Egon

singing. "The men have come back." In the dark, beside the blaze of the window, she stopped. "Do not misunderstand me," she said earnestly. "I was thinking of Archibald's happiness only, and yours."

Egon was singing "O voi, chi entrate!"

Pini, on entering the room, had gone up to his wife and entreated her to sing. Lying back, in her odalisque pose, she had excused herself; and, when he persisted:

"Mio amico," she said, "I will do what thou wilt. My one pleasure is to please thee: thou art good to me. But see—do not ask me to sing: there is no one that cares! Last night, when I sang, they talked on: they made noises. The cousins mixed their cards, the lovers hissed on the terrace, the poor husband snored!"

He would have protested, but she stopped him.

"Thou? Oh, I know thou art most courteous. But thou hearest not false notes—I have tried! And thou thinkest of thy system—always!"

Konrad, who had been watching them, drew near. "Countess," he said, "why don't you ask my brother to sing?"

"He sings, your brother!" She opened her eyes wide, and her languid limbs seemed to harden.

"You just try him."

She lifted herself, with a shake, like a dog's, and beckoned to Egon. "Monsieur de Roden," she said, "you sing?"

"Yes, I sing."

"Well?" she asked, with a mocking look in her eyes.

"Better than anybody I ever heard," called Archie from the depths of his easy chair, which was rather nice of Archie, for he had been in Giulietta's memory when she scornfully asked, "Well?" Archibald sang comic songs with much pantomime and little voice, and, the other night, after having asked him, she had walked away on to the terrace. She had the grace to give as explanation excess of laughter, and he the wit not to believe her, but she never asked him again.

"What will you, my love?" she said to the protesting Pini. "I have nerves, I cannot help it. And, besides, to me, art, of the humblest, is a sacred thing which I will not profane. Not even in this house, whose sheer existence profanes it daily. A house like this, on this site, it is like a caricature of the Virgin, in the cathedral at Milan!"

"Hush, hush; she will hear thee!" cried Pini, alarmed.

Giulietta shrugged her shoulders. "Nay, she hears me not. As I know."

When the first notes of "Oh voi che entrate" rose in the lofty drawing-room, the Countess Pini, who had sunk back among her cushions, raised her little head erect. In another moment she had lifted her lithe frame, and hung poised. As the singing continued, she rose noiselessly to her feet, bending slightly forwards, breathless.

Dorothea, in the opening of the window, against the shadows of the terrace and the blackness beyond, stood watching her. To the singer's wife occurred the sudden picture of a serpent, fascinated by music, and her heart glowed with a fresh impulse of pride in the song.

When the last note died away, the Italian went swiftly to the piano.

"Yes, you sing," she said, and after a moment added, "I say not with Lord Archibald, for I have heard singing as good, perhaps better—cleverer. But, see, you have the true emotions in that beautiful voice!"

"Will you sing us some more?" It was palpable to all present, who cared, that this passionate creature was seeking to hide her agitation. He took up a pretty German thing: "Vöglein, wohin so schnell?" and placed it before him, but she snatched it away with a movement certainly more violent than she had intended; it escaped from her fingers and flew, rustling, across the floor.

"Italian! Italian!" she said. He obeyed with a Neapolitan country-song. "Yes," she said, when it was over, "yes. But it wants a Neapolitan peasant, who doesn't sing as well as you, to sing Neapolitan songs. Or a fisherman from Santa Lucia, eh, Bartolommeo? Sing 'Oh voi che entrate!' again!"

And again the words rose in the listening silence of the great saloon:

"Oh voi che entrate nel Paradiso d'Amore!"

"Now, thou also, Giulietta, thou must show what thou canst do," said her husband.

"I? I can do nothing. I cannot sing."

"Ta, ta, ta! Thou canst sing well enough."

She turned on him with a scream. "I cannot sing! La! I cannot sing!" And she swept up the far length of the room.

He followed her with insinuating "empressement," and spoke in a voice that was almost audible to their guests:

"The Countess Pini will remember the first rules of Italian courtesy."

She faced round, passed him, straight to the piano, sat down and began:

"A Roma s'è scoperta 'na fontana,
Che a dodici cannelle l'acqua vera;
Dice che l'ammalati li risana . . .
Io l'ho bevuta, e l'ho fatta la prova,
Per le pene d'amor l'acqua non giova;
Io l'ho bevuta, e la prova l'ho fatta,
Per le pene d'amor non giova l'acqua."

She rose from the instrument, speaking to Egon:

"E un canto popolare Marchigiano. Parla Italiano? Ah, perchè non ha detto? It is the single language which speaks itself; in all others one only can say things!"

Dorothea, who had seated herself on a couch by the window, watched them as they bent together over the music, discussing and comparing. Presently they happened on a duet well known to both, and sang it eagerly. They tried something else; they had forgotten all surroundings; *Giulietta's* eyes sparkled; her cheeks were aflame.

Dorothea rose brusquely and went out again on to the terrace, into the cool darkness of the stars. Quite a new sensation had suddenly awakened in her heart—jealousy. Not, certainly, doubt of her husband or of *Giulietta*—that were an absolute absurdity—but pain that another woman should thus interest and please him.

"Contemptible!" she said to herself aloud, in the stillness, and she struck her own heart, as a glove is dashed in the face of a craven. She went back to the music and, see! Lady Archibald barred her path, emerging abruptly from among the plants.

"Forgive me!" gasped Lord Archibald's wife. "And—and pray for me! There, don't say anything, please. If you didn't hear what I said, so much the better. How well your husband sings!"

Dorothea would have put out her arm around the other's neck, but Lady Archibald drew back.

"That is Pallanza over yonder!" said Lady Archibald tremulously. "Don't think of what I said. Archie, come then, and sit with me on the terrace!"

"It's too cold," answered Archie in sleepy tones.

Lady Archibald stamped her foot on the terrace tiles.

"How ungallant you husbands are!" Konrad's voice was heard saying. His step drew nearer.

"Fate is fate," whispered Lady Archibald as the two women passed into the room together. "Archie, thou art what thou dost call the others—a mitten—no, how say you?—a muff!"

"I'll come, if you like," replied her husband.

"Nay, we will stay here. We will listen to the songs."

CHAPTER XIII.

"THE weather is perfect. You must go," said Egon, early next morning, as he drew aside the window curtains of the Pocahontas chamber.

"They are all going," he added. "I should be very sorry if you stopped at home for me."

Dorothea lifted her head. "And I should be so glad," she said.

"Why? Don't you want to go?"

She hesitated a moment. "Nonsense," continued her husband quickly. "The view from the Motterone must be splendid. I'm sure you can manage it." He sighed. "I wish I could."

"I do not want to go," said Dorothea.

He stood looking at her for a moment: then he drew up her chin towards his face and kissed her. "No," he said, "that would never, never do. It is bad enough, Dorothea. You would make it hurt more than I could bear." And he limped away into his dressing-room.

Immediately after breakfast all prepared to start. The Monte Motterone rises behind the Villa 'Arriet, a long-drawn but nowise arduous climb. Signor Pini had a donkey; the others walked.

Waiting out on the terrace, Konrad von Roden drew his elder brother aside. "I heard from the Head last night," he said.

"Indeed?" Egon broke off a branch of myrtle.

"Well, he can't manage about the entail. I congratulate you. You can imagine what a state he's in! His whole letter's one mass of swears."

"I can hardly believe that," said Egon.

"The writing is," said Konrad. "I can see it. All the dashes of the t's and the dots on the i's are swears."

Egon only laughed.

"You may well laugh. He's just got the Imperial consent to a single alteration, the abolition of the clause

about not marrying within a year. When he dies, lots *must* be cast between the married nephews, but I may marry at once, if I like." He waited, but Egon did not speak.

"Only you, as next heir, must consent to the alteration. A prohibition to marry is always immoral, say the powers that be, but the next heir's acquired rights cannot be touched without his consent. You understand?"

"Perfectly," replied Egon. "Were you wanting to marry?"

"Not in the least. Like most of us, I was wanting not to. Still——"

"Well?"

"Sooner or later, there always comes some reason which makes us want to want. Now the earldom of Rheyna——"

"Konrad!"

"Is safely yours as long as I remain unmarried. And, as things now stand, I can't marry within a year of our father's death."

"In no case, surely, would it be decent——"

Konrad swayed round, with a fierce scowl. "It was decent enough just before," he said. "Had you waited a couple of months, the chances would have been equal for all three."

"You may marry to-morrow for all I care," answered Egon hotly. "The whole thing is to me disgusting in the extreme."

Konrad smiled. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind writing to the Emperor," he sneered, "and signifying your willingness to cut off every form of entail?"

"No, by George!" exclaimed Egon. "I've as much right to the thing as you. More, being the eldest. I won't stand being accused of taking a mean advantage, but I'll stick to my honest rights."

"Then you won't consent to abolish the marriage prohibition?"

"Konrad, you and I never seem able to understand each other. I'll consent to alter everything except the casting of lots."

Konrad gave an audible gasp of relief. "Write to uncle Karl then, and tell him so," he said quickly. "'Ask the—h'm—him I shall *not*,' says uncle Karl with a big damn—dash, I mean—over the t."

"I will write," answered Egon, "but I cannot, for the life of me, see the great importance of the matter. Uncle

Karl is not ill ; you are not even engaged. In a few months you will be quite free to marry—however, never mind."

"You would see the importance fast enough, if you were in my place," retorted Konrad grimly. "Till you stole that march on us this summer, I have always thought my chance of Rheyna as good as certain. I'm much luckier than you are, and the devil helps his own. Lord, if the gout were to fly to uncle Karl's stomach while we're talking! There are the ladies; let us go to them."

"I shall write this morning : you had better propose to somebody by the same post," said Egon bitterly.

"I shall leave that to uncle Karl," replied Konrad. "Then she may be an heiress, and she is bound to be well-born."

Giulietta stood, in fawn-coloured walking costume, on the broad terrace, with the morning sunlight around her, meditatively gazing at the crest of Motterone. She turned her eyes on the two approaching brothers, more meditatively still. From under the Moorish portico the rest of the party, gaily chattering, gathered around her.

"I am not going," said Giulietta. A general outcry arose around the words.

"But, *cava mia*——"

"No, I am not going. It is too hot—or too windy, up yonder!" She pointed. "I am tired already. My feet are not made for a whole day's climb." She looked down at her shapely brown-leather boots. "*Basta!* I am not going. I wish you a thousand pleasures." She walked towards the house.

Ten minutes later she came into the big, calm library, where Egon had settled down to write.

"Ah, letters!" she said. "Ah, correspondence! Shall we sing?"

"Would a little later suit you as well?" he hesitated. "I have a letter of the greatest importance to dispatch before the post goes out. I have promised——"

"Ah, I might have realised that you would be able to amuse yourself," she flashed instant reply.

He coloured, as he understood that she had stopped at home for him.

"Your wife comprehends you better," said Giulietta. "She knows that she need deny herself nothing; you suffice to yourself. Why did you marry, Monsieur de Roden?"

"Why did I marry? Because——"

She flung herself on a couch. "Oh, because you were in love, of course, I understand that. That would of course be your only reason: you are that sort of man. But the cause, the cause!" She clashed her hands together as if they had been cymbals. "I—I do not suffice to myself. Nothing suffices me. I am like a bagatelle ball—have you seen it?—rolling, rolling, knocking against every obstacle, twisted, turned, dropping from one hole to another, but I never find the last hole, in which one rests." She dropped her voice. "Bah, we all find the last hole," she added, and then, almost inaudibly, even in the silence: "Mine is——" She turned to him with a laugh. "You think I mean the grave?" she cried. "I mean Pini. He is excellent: he is a good man, a good husband. I adore him."

Egon sat twisting his pen.

"You look solemn," she went on, "like all those who have never known trouble."

"Everybody has known trouble," he protested lamely.

"Not of the kind I mean. Shall I tell you my life? No, not yet; we do not know each other enough. But we know each other enough now for Leopardi. Shall we read, then? Or sing? No, sing. Your letter can wait." She sprang to her feet and began dancing down the big room:

"Oh, conta quante stelle, quante stelle,
Vedi, se le dà l'animo a contalle!
Conta, le pene mia so' tutte quelle."

Suddenly she stopped. "That is very sad, very sad," she said. "And I am not sad at all. I am gay." She stood drumming her fingers against the window-pane and softly humming:

"Conta, le pene mia so' tutte quelle."

Presently she glided towards the writing-table. "You do not want to sing," she said; "you shall write your letter first. I will sit here meanwhile, quiet as a mouse, and I will read. You think I cannot be quiet? I can only lie indolent and chatter? You will see; you will see." She stole on tiptoe to a distant sofa, sank down upon it and hid behind the "Nuova Anthologia." For half an hour nothing was heard in the room but the scratching of Egon's pen, the buzz of the flies against the big plate-glass windows, and an occasional rustle of Giulietta's review.

"I have finished my letter," said Egon, rising.

"But not I my article," said Giulietta, without lifting her eyes from the page.

Egon bit his lip. "I beg your pardon, I really could not help myself, a matter of the greatest importance! My time—need I say it?—is yours."

"When not wanted by yourself," replied Giulietta laughing. "The article is interesting: it treats of the rôle played by women in the liberation of Italy. Pini told me to read it. Not that I care about political women as a rule. There was another, a few months ago, by the same man, on the part taken by women in the renascence. *That* appealed to me. The part played by women in the renascence. Think of it!" She got up and came towards him, her big eyes shining. "That men should say: Thou art dead; thou wert a woman. Thou hast helped to make the world's life—not better, that is foolishness; the world never grows better or wiser—but more beautiful than it was before!" She went straight past him, with the full glow of her gaze upon him, yet not looking into his eyes. At the door she turned. "You thought I could not sit silent, while you were working," she said lightly. "You know me so little. It is my ideal, to be poor, decently poor, nothing squalid, and to sit with my needlework in a corner, while my husband earns bread for both by making some beautiful thing. I, too, should work hard, in my corner. For the home. Come, Signor Egon, let us go and sing duets. One never attains one ideal. It is lucky. After luncheon I shall take you a long, a very long, drive. Away into the Domo d' Ossola country."

After luncheon, then, they started early, Egon driving a light-coloured, four-wheeled country cart, with a groom behind them.

"You like my husband," said Giulietta, as they dashed briskly across the plain. "I am anxious you should like my husband. You cannot think how good he is. He has suffered. He is full of generous instincts. I adore Bartolommeo."

Egon mumbled perfunctory politeness; not even the signore's specious vindications could reconcile him to the gambling business.

"You do not appreciate him," said Giulietta angrily. "He is worth half a dozen cold-blooded young men of to-day." Then, fearing she had spoken discourteously: "How well you drive!" she said. "Is riding quite impossible?"

"Quite," he said shortly. "Thanks." And the thanks were for the tone of her voice.

"Surely, I should think," she began. "I have an idea that——" She stopped dead. "No!" she said, as if keeping back words she was desirous but unable to utter. "As for me, I have never driven or ridden. I fear horses; they are so strong, and so afraid. Strength should be calm. Your wife, I suppose she does all these things well?"

"Dorothea can ride and drive."

"And bicycle, and play tennis?"

"Yes, she can do all these things. None of them to any superlative degree of excellence."

Giulietta sighed. "Also she can paint," she said. Egon was silent. "I—I can do nothing of all this. I can only sing."

"You sing superbly."

"Well, so do you. I need only return the compliment. You must think me very ignorant?"

There was so much question in her accent that Egon could not ignore it. "You walk better than any woman rides," he said unwillingly, but feeling, in his *naïve* wisdom, as if he were comforting a child. "I am sure you dance to perfection."

"Ah, I adore dancing! We must get up a dance to-night; we must waltz!"

An awkward silence sank between them. "No, we shall not dance," said Giulietta, and her voice trembled. "The others will be too tired."

"Look at that pretty little goatherd!" answered Egon, touching up one of the horses.

"He is like one of our Neapolitan children; only a trifle better dressed. What a quick eye you have for beauty! No wonder that you married a beautiful wife."

Did she mean her words? Surely every one must admit a considerable amount of good looks in Dorothea.

"I am glad you admire her," he said. "If you want me to like your husband, well, I want you to like my wife."

"Why?" she said quickly.

For the life of him, he could not have spoken a satisfactory reply. "I want everybody to like Dorothea," he said. "She has need of friends."

"Thank you." He could see she was offended. She made few remarks, chiefly about the landscape, as they neared their destination, the Cavalduna waterfall.

"It is a long drive. I am tired," she said, as she seated

herself by a shaky table outside the little osteria. "Let us have a bicchiere of their country wine."

"By all means. Will you not sit here?"

"I am very well as I am," she answered impatiently.

"But you are turning your back on the fountain you came to see."

"I know. When I am tired, I cannot enjoy things. I feel, in the whole world, like a violin in an orchestra. It is no use letting yourself be played on as long as you're out of tune."

"And who tunes you?" he queried, amused.

She stared him straight in the face. "Men," she said. She laughed merrily. "And women. And little digestible dishes. And, above all, the sun."

The polite innkeeper brought his thin red vintage. He cast appreciative glances at the smart equipage, a hundred paces off, under the olive trees.

"Bring wine to the groom also," said Giulietta.

"With pleasure, Eccellenza."

"I," continued the Countess Pini, "I could live in harmony with all things, if only I might leave untouched what appeals not to my heart. I have a big, big heart, Monsieur de Roden."

"I know," he said shamefacedly. "You stopped at home this morning for my sake, that I might not be lonely. You are taking me this beautiful drive, which is too far for you——"

"Nonsense. You speak foolishness."

"And I am very deeply grateful."

She paused, with the "bicchiere" half way to her lips. "You are quite mistaken," she said steadily. "I dislike these long mountain climbs. And the Cavalduna waterfall is my favourite drive. Why, pray, should I take so much trouble to please you? You flatter yourself."

"Madame, I was only doing honour to your kindness as a hostess." Von Roden flushed.

"That is the one character in which, according to Pini, I hopelessly break down. His are old-world ideas of courtesy; you have touched on the sole subject of dissension between us. I am incapable of receiving, says Pini, for I lie on my sofa and let people amuse themselves."

"Or climb up Motterone!" said Egon, gazing away towards the round mountain that filled up his southern horizon. "I hope they are finding that enjoyable."

"Shall we talk about them for a change. I seem to have been talking about myself all the time. Have you noticed that, when people know each other but little, and want to know each other more, they always do that?"

"Do what?"

"How dull you are! Or pretend to be. Talk each about himself. Shall we talk about Lady Archie? I do not like her; she is '*mauvais genre*.' Do you know on what rule I was brought up by my mother? Never to talk about people, only about things. It was an estimable rule. But it made conversation very dull. My mother did not adhere to it."

"My father's rule was different, yet similar. Never to talk about what could benefit nobody."

"And did your father keep to his rule?"

"Does anybody invariably do so?"

"Did you love your father? He is recently dead?"

"More than any man on earth."

"Well, shall we talk about him? Tell me about him!"

"Not just now," he said, more and more "*gêné*."

She rang her bracelets against each other, with the impulsive movement of her hands. "I understand," she said angrily. "You think we are not sufficiently intimate. Well, whom do you like best after your father?"

"I cannot say."

"Why not? If you say your brother, I shall not believe you."

"Why not?" It was his turn.

"Because brothers do not love each other. Especially not brothers who are utterly dissimilar. You are foolish, Herr von Roden; do you not see that I but make conversation. What do I care? I do not even know the man."

"I was afraid you would laugh at me, that was all."

"All? To a man it is everything. I suppose you would say, like a man whom I asked once before: '*my dog*'?"

"It is my servant," said Egon stiffly. He got up to walk towards the waterfall.

"Your servant?" She frowned. Then she came closer, walking beside him. "That is very Italian," she said. "Quite like one of us. Not at all what I should have thought of one of your northern grand seigneurs. Herr von Roden, I am going to pay you an immense compliment, the biggest I can: when I see you, and read you—I love

reading people like books—almost you might be an Italian, a good Italian, I mean. Not the sort you dream of, from the opera, with stilettos."

"And why not stilettos?" replied Egon. "A man is none the worse for being able to use, well, not a stiletto, perhaps, but a rapier. 'Do you bite your thumb at me, sir?' You remember?"

"Of course I remember. As a girl, years ago, I learnt 'Romeo and Juliet' by heart, of evenings, in my bed. I used to spend my little pocket-money on candles; an hour every night, in the Italian, I used to sit and repeat. I used to fancy I was *Giulietta*. Well!"

He did not speak.

"There was no Romeo. There was no garden. There was only a narrow yard, with tall houses opposite, and heaps of dirty clothes."

"It is pleasant to think that now you have one of the most beautiful gardens in Italy," he suggested good-naturedly.

"Yes, and a balcony. And a husband whose good qualities I fully appreciate. The waterfall is splendid, but it is noisy. Have you realised at all, that a storm is creeping up?"

"A storm? No, indeed." Egon's alarmed glances swept the firmament.

"You do not know the country as I do. Those clouds over yonder by the Simplon. I think we had better return."

"And yet it is too late," she said, as the carriage bowled swiftly along the hard, white road. She had turned once or twice to watch the upward sweep of the woolly black masses against the sinking sunlight.

"We shall never get back in time, Herr von Roden."

"Then let us stop at the first albergo we reach," he said.

"No, no; we cannot do that."

"But why not?"

"Please not. I would rather not. Drive faster, please. Yet that would be no use, and I would not have you worry the horses. You see, I am not a horsewoman, and so I hate torturing horses. A woman's love of animals always takes that shape. Hold them in, Herr von Roden, please; we must make up our minds to a wetting."

"But I cannot allow that. I am responsible for you

to Signor Pini." He began to draw in his reins, as the carriage approached a little wayside inn.

"Because you are responsible," she said quickly. "Avanti!" The horses leaped forward, past the indolent, slouch-hatted, slouching figure against the broken wall. The slow figure turned its head and looked after them. The wind had arisen. A few heavy drops began to fall.

"You will be soaked. It is madness!" he cried, pressing the carriage rug down upon the seat. She had only a white lace sunshade, a lot of white muslin and lace about her shoulders.

"There are worse madnesses than a wetting," she answered. "Let us get home and dry ourselves as soon as we can." Already the rain was coming down in torrents.

The quiet Italian groom behind her had softly drawn off his autumn livery coat and now thrust it between the two figures on the front seat. "The Signora Contessa will die of cold," he said to Egon. "She must wrap the rug around her, and place this coat across her knees."

"Francesco, put on thy coat this instant!"

The servant faintly smiled, and sat cross-armed, the thick rain blackening his shiny shirt-sleeves. Egon hurriedly flung the thick wrap about Giulietta's shoulders; the rain came streaming down, the deserted road seemed endless. It was dusk by the time they drew up, dripping, before the palazzo door.

Signor Pini stood in the entrance. "Come in! Come in this instant," he cried superfluously. "We got back only half an hour ago. Madame de Roden is changing her things."

Egon handed the reins to the groom. "God grant that the Signora Contessa has taken no harm!" said the fellow. "She is too good for this world. Some day she will die."

This, to Egon, was a new light on Giulietta. He acquiesced in the possibility of Giulietta's demise, and went up to his wife's room.

"The rain was fun," said Dorothea in response to his solicitude. "You know, Egon, I do not mind rain. It was splendid to see the great shadows come up across the lake. Oh, of course, one would have preferred fine weather all through, but we had a splendid view from the top and a very amusing luncheon."

She was getting into a tea-gown, which was a favourite

of his, with big blue passion-flowers embroidered on blue. "My selection," says Bompard. "I hope you also enjoyed yourself," continued Dorothea before the glass. She had not the slightest intention of laying in her voice the accent which he found there.

"Oh yes. It was almost too kind of the Countess Pini to stay for my sake." And his tone was unnecessarily awkward.

"For your sake?" She veered round. "The Countess Pini is just the kind of person to hate mountaineering!"

"Well, she is also just the kind of person to love doing kindnesses."

"You think so? She does not strike me in that light at all."

"Dorothea, you are so good, you find it difficult to like people."

"Ah, that is what my father says, though he says it less prettily. Why don't you put it in his words?" Dorothea spoke with some bitterness.

"I am sure your father and I do not mean the same thing. You are unlike other women, Dolly. I do not want to mention you and them in the same breath. You do not understand the good qualities of women who are not so—not so good as yourself."

She checked her own hand on the door-handle. She came back to him. "What was the word you wanted to say, Egon, before you said 'good?'"

He laughed, flushed; she saw it.

"I have a right to know," she continued gravely. "I have a right that you should help me with my faults. Speak out. It was 'self-righteous,' was it not?" She stood looking at him, all the light of her innocent soul in her candid eyes.

"No, by Heaven!" he burst out, thoroughly disconcerted. "If you want to know, it was 'pure.'" He would have caught her in his arms and covered her lifted face with kisses, but he restrained himself. He saw her blush crimson.

"I don't think I quite understand," she said, and she held her lips up to his, like a child, and passed out.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN Egon entered the drawing-room ten minutes later, Signor Pini was standing in the middle of the floor. "No, they have not come back yet," he was saying irritably. "Can I help it?"

"I presume not," replied Archie, irritably too, "but the arrangements seem defective." He lounged up against the mantelpiece, a horrible blue and gold mosaic. "Egon," he said, "your brother and my wife have not yet turned up. We left them behind, rushing down in the rain."

"Lost on the Motterone!" cried Dorothea nervously.

"Konrad is a military man; he would soon recover his bearings," declared Egon soothingly.

"It is Konrad's fault!" cried Archie, and "It is all that ass's fault!" exclaimed Pini simultaneously. Even in the midst of his annoyance, the wretched Archie could not forbear a grin, as the possibilities of Tomfoolery dawned upon him. "I will tell Konrad when he returns," said Archie.

"The donkey kept running away with me," explained Pini to his wife and to Egon.

"When found, make a note of! The joke is original," said Archie, and took out his faithful memorandum book.

A servant brought in a telegram.

"From them? Impossible!" cried Giulietta.

Her husband opened it and handed it to Dorothea. "Colonel and Mrs. Sandring arrive to-morrow after lunch," he said.

"Mrs. Sandring." The words struck cold on Dorothea's bosom. Of course this woman was Mrs. Sandring. Somehow, on the rare occasions when she had been mentioned, people—the aunts, Egon's mother—had spoken of "your father's wife." Before Dorothea's vision rose up a quiet northern churchyard, and a cold white cross: "Sacred to the memory of Dorothea, Baroness Brodryck"—sacred to the memory—the memory, bidding you pass on and forget.

"Colonel and Mrs. Sandring!" repeated Egon, and his

quiet voice was aflame with resentment. His tone recalled his wife to the needs of the moment.

"Yes, they happen to be in Milan. So they are coming on here," replied their imperturbable host.

"Dorothea, did you know that your father was at Milan?"

"It is some time since I have heard from him, Egon. I shall be very pleased to see him again."

"Of course, I had no idea, Count, that a couple of nights under your roof would procure us the pleasure of a meeting with Colonel and Mrs. Sandring."

"What more natural? The Colonel is an old friend of mine; I first met him years ago at the house of his present wife's cousin, the Count di Casa Profonda."

"It is a put-up thing," said Egon fiercely, inaudibly, as he turned away towards the window.

"You are annoyed; shall we change it? I am grieved," murmured Giulietta's soft accents behind him. She drew him aside. "You want not the papa and the mother-in-law!" she said. "We will telegraph them off!"

"It could not be done with decency," he answered. "We are leaving to-morrow."

"Ah, no—not that!"

"It was always our plan to go back to Bel Respiro."

"A man's plans are made for a woman to break them. You will stay."

"I fear it is impossible."

"Because I ask you."

"You are laughing at me."

"As you like, then—run away from Mrs. Sandring. Are you afraid of her?"

"No."

"Of me, then?" She drew herself up, and, of course, she laughed.

So he wisely laughed also. "Dorothea must decide," he said.

"Whether I am a woman to be afraid of?"

"No, how long we shall enjoy Mrs. Sandring's company."

"I depend, then, on Madame de Roden's charity. Lord Archibald, I beg of you do not look so anxious. My husband has sent back the guides, you know. And there is not a shadow of danger in connection with Motterone."

"I am not anxious, Contessa; I am angry."

"Well, that is a conjugal condition with which I feel little sympathy, especially not when the object of your ire is being driven home through the night very wet and tired and hungry."

"That word suggests dinner," said Pini. "It has been too long delayed." He gave his arm to Dorothea, and led her down the long saloons of the Villa 'Arriet. "*Bellissima*," he murmured, "was it not you that desired the inevitable? Well, it was brought about—*et après*?"

"What do you mean, Count?"

"The lady who comes here to-morrow is Mrs. Sandring. Surely you will stay to receive her?"

"Most certainly I shall stay to receive my father's wife."

He bent over the hand upon his arm. "*Purissima*," he said, "I kiss the hem of your garment. Nightly, I pray the Virgin—she, after all, is the goddess of luck—to give you half, at least, of the happiness you deserve. You are too good for this world—by which I mean this society. You were certainly too good for me. You are almost too good for your very good husband. Will you sit here, at my right hand? But I warn you that he intends to run away from Mrs. Sandring."

"Champagne!" said Archibald to the man who brought him his soup. "Take this away and get me some champagne."

"Put the bottle beside Milord," said Pini, who was himself most abstemious, only desiring vermouth when he could not afford to pay for it. But he knew that Lord Archibald possessed not a single vice except "punistry." "A Northerner, when he is vexed, he must drink," says Pini, "a Southerner, he must pray." Lord Archibald, it appears, was very seriously vexed; he ate nothing—he, a hearty eater—and he finished the bottle without noticing the fact. He mixed his wines indiscriminately; once or twice he put his empty glass to his lips, and the servants filled it.

At long intervals, Pini asked after the weather; the butler still answered that it was raining fast. "D—the weather!" said Lord Archibald under his breath. "People could not seriously get lost on the Motterone; there was no real danger," said Pini, half a dozen times. "Lost!" burst out Archibald at last. "Lost! Some women could get lost in a drawing-room!" A horrible silence fell upon the company: the two wives shrank, like a dog in dread of a blow. The Italian cousins, whom nobody noticed, began chattering to each other of acquaintances whom nobody knew.

"On demande Milord au téléphone!" said the solemn French butler.

Archibald jumped to his feet. He swayed slightly : his boyish face went white and red.

"Shall I go first?" cried von Roden.

"Why?" demanded Archie, pausing, his napkin in his hand. "Are you afraid of bad news? What is bad news?" He followed the servant to a small room in the "offices," whence the telephone bell rang out suddenly again, as he approached.

"Hullo!" called Archie. His colour went from red to white. He did not fear bad news.

"Is that you, Archie?" came back Lady Archibald's shrill voice through the tube.

"Yes, it's me," was the husband's sullen reply.

"We are up here, at the Motterone Hôtel. Don't be anxious about me! I'm in no sort of danger."

"I should think not, with that fool, Konrad!"

"Hist, for goodness' sake. He's in the room."

"I thought he might be."

"What meanest thou, silly? The little hotel is very poor and uncomfortable, but it will do for the night."

"Room for two, I suppose?" called Archie. His voice was savage.

"Shout not so. We got lost in the rain and wandered back here."

"Didn't notice you were going up, I suppose?"

"Well, hardly that, but we found we were——"

"Naturally not; you were going down all the time."

"Lord Archibald, I understand not. What meanest thou?"

"Pons!" shrieked the wretched young man, and laughed uproariously into the telephone.

"Let off there : thou ticklest me," came the angry reply.

"For the night, then, I must stay here. Ask Count Pini to send a carriage to meet us at the foot to-morrow morning."

"Better come down to-night," said Archie, and his voice was not too loud this time.

"But I cannot—impossible—in the pouring wet, and the darkness!"

"Better come down to-night," hissed Archie.

"Thou art mad : it is four hours' climb down the slopes. A dog would not do it."

"Wouldn't he? Well, let him stop up there!"

"Till to-morrow, then. My love to Giulietta!"

"By all means. I say, Lady Archibald—Dickie!"

"Yes?"

"Better come down to-night!"

"I do not understand at all. Your voice sounds so queer through the telephone. Is it another pon? I never understand thy pons!"

"It is not a pon," said Archie, and rang the little bell that ends the interview.

He went back to the dinner-table. "How long you have been!" cried all. "Good news, I hope?" said somebody.

"Oh yes, they are up at the little hotel." He turned to Egon: "Your brother is safe." He poured himself out a tumbler of sherry and drank it.

"Have something to eat now: you have eaten nothing," said Dorothea.

He looked at her, but he pushed aside the dish a footman was holding. "Good news! bad news!" he muttered once or twice to himself. His manner was certainly strange. The ladies felt relieved to find themselves deprived of his presence in the drawing-room.

For Signor Pini, who, as a rule, detested smoking-rooms, billiard-rooms, whisky and soda smells—all the attributes of modern masculinity; Signor Pini, whose existence, whether rich or poor, was of old-worldness, pretty compliments in female society, sobriety and saintliness complete; Signor Pini, who shrank from loud oaths and loud laughter, fell asleep during sporting stories and missed the point of coarse ones—this Signor Pini now seemed anxious to confine his young friends to the farther end of the cumbersome edifice. He motioned the butler, behind Archibald's back, to remove the liqueurs, thereby awakening a sudden feeling of resentment in the dumb, digestive old Italian cousin, who sank to repose in an enormous arm-chair. A protuberant and pasty old cousin, with very short legs and a very long name.

"Egon," said Archibald, standing with his legs apart, a coffee-cup in his hand, "I believe you're a thorough good chap."

"Thank you," replied Egon.

"But your brother's a beastly cad!"

The words fell softly, quite unexpectedly, like a dead weight at one's feet. Both Pini and von Roden started back.

"Lord Archibald," said Egon, hotly, "you have not the faintest idea what you are saying."

"Are you going to deny it?" cried Archie, in a sudden blaze of pent-up fury.

"You are going to unsay it," replied Egon, as furiously.

Signor Pini came between. "Gentlemen," he began—and in that one word from his lips lay such an oppression of courtly scorn and reproof that both combatants stopped dead.

"I," said Lord Archibald presently, confusedly, "I—— look here, I suppose different men have different ways of behaving. I suppose the correct card 'd be not to take any notice; not to say anything, at any rate; to go and shoot somebody in silence, like in the French books, or horsewhip him, like in the English, eh? Well, I ain't the correct card. I speak out, like the fool I am, like the fool I've always been. There's fools and villains in this world, von Roden, and the fools have a bad time." He staggered forward into the glare of the lamp. "My God!" he said, "I've got a wife who's a——"

A little table at Pini's elbow went over with a crash, a table full of brittle Kahyle pottery, a great noise and a greater mess. The silent cousin started into life. "Diavolo!" "Dear me," said Pini contemptively, "Abdelkader's present to Mister 'Arriet. A royal relic less!"

He glided after Archie and pressed his fingers on the young man's arm. "You are not well, dear Milord," he murmured, "you have been upset by this anxiety. Supposing you went to your room?"

Archie shuddered. "I don't want to go to—my room," he said piteously. "I won't trouble you long, Count Pini. I want to stay here to-night. You, you can do me a great kindness. I am leaving to-morrow by the earliest boat."

"Milord, you are committing a great mistake."

"Count Pini!"

"I am an old man: I will say my say."

"All I ask is that you extend your hospitality to Lady Archibald until she has heard from me."

"This is madness. Monsieur de Roden, help me to persuade this infatuated boy!"

"Archie, you must stay," said Egon firmly. "You dislike Konrad: I promise to rid you of his presence to-morrow. My wife and I are leaving before lunch."

"Monsieur de Roden," put in Pini gently, "permit me

to say, when I think of your exquisite consort, that you are committing a crime."

"Monsieur, you are my host——"

"I am an old man: for once I will say my say. Per Bacco!" his voice rang out, "because young men lose their tempers, shall the whole world be upset? A smash is an easy thing, the easiest thing in the world!" He pointed to the ruined table. "Any fool can make a smash: only a wise man can walk, like a cat, among crockery. And what are your women, pray, but pots of perfume"—a glance at Archie—"or basins of holy water"—a wave at Egon. "Ah, Santa Madre! Santa Madre! these men! Not one deserves a good woman! Not one deserves a bad!"

"Your invitation to Mrs. Sandring," said Egon, white with passion, "was a put-up thing. You asked us on purpose."

"I could make appropriate speeches," replied the Italian. "Beautiful, haughty speeches about my rights in my own house. I do not do so. True, Mrs. Sandring has a claim to meet her husband's daughter. The daughter's virtue itself has ordained such matters beyond your petty objections. Colonel Sandring is yearning to press his child to his heart. Well, I plead guilty. I am his accomplice. Good!"

"Oh yes, come, Egon, you must let Sandring see his daughter," put in Archie. The young man spoke eagerly in his own natural voice.

"What is my small row," replied Egon desperately, "compared to the big one you are kicking up?"

"You leave me alone," said Archie. "I'm going off to-morrow at six o'clock. You leave me to settle my own affairs. Heigho, what shall I do till to-morrow morning? I say, Egon, let's have a game of billiards."

"If you like," said Egon, glad to divert the other's thoughts, and his own. They took their cues, and Archibald made the first cannon.

Signor Pini stood watching them. "You do not play for stakes?" he said. "I could not do that. I should take no interest in the game. How good are the young Northerners, not pious, as we, but unwisely good, and foolish!"

The two players stopped and looked at each other.

"Now, even thus watching you, I must bet on your

chances, but how? My cousin? Ah no! Signori, I must bet against myself, I will bet for the Holy Virgin. Ten louis, if you win, dear Lord Archibald, to the building of the Church of the Blessed Mary in Mercato!"

"Archie, I will play you for to-morrow," said Egon. "If you lose, you stay——"

"What business——"

"You forget that I am Konrad's elder brother. My name is Roden."

"And if I win, you do not go," cried Archie, a malicious flash in his harmless eyes.

"You cannot refuse!" exclaimed Pini.

"Play your best then." Egon struck fiercely, and missed.

"I shall," said Archie. Egon was a better player than he, and surely, at this moment, the German's hand must be the firmer. Egon felt pretty safe.

"You play," said Pini, "for Madonna in heaven and Madonna on earth, milord. You must win." And, indeed, Archie's aim amazingly steadied itself. Once or twice he was lucky: several times he was brilliant. He won easily.

"You and I, then, we must execute ourselves with a good grace, monsieur," said Pini. Egon was bitterly angry; the idea of seeing the Baroness Blanche in intercourse with his wife was revolting to him.

"And Archie has the satisfaction," he said, "of making ——" He stopped himself.

"Making what?" demanded Archie. All his *brio* seemed once more to have forsaken him. He stood staring disconsolately at the broken pottery.

"Mountains of molehills," substituted Egon.

"Would to God they were molehills," said Archie, "and I as blind as a mole."

CHAPTER XV.

"BUT yes, we are too early," said she who had once been the Baroness Blanche de Fleuryse. "Why are we too early, *mon Colonel*?"

"Because we started too early," replied Sandring, trying to look amused. "My wife, you see,"—his appeal embraced the whole company—"always thinks that she'll miss her train, unless she can catch the preceding one." The Italian cousin woke up. "I know that sort of woman," he said sympathetically, from out the depths of some personal experience.

"Don't run down your wife, Colonel; it's bad form," cried the Baroness tartly. Often had Sandring entreated her not to address him by his title. "It's not much, but it's all you've got, and I'll let people know it," said the whilom lady of rank.

They were in the entrance-hall of the Villa 'Arriet: the Pinis, the native nonentities, Egon and Dorothea, had come out to meet the freshly arriving guests.

"My dear Countess, I should like to sit down," said Mrs. Sandring, and she led the way herself into a large conservatory that opened out of the hall. She sank down on a wicker lounge under palm trees. Her marriage had made her more massive, more florid, altogether more. "My dear Dorothea, you are looking handsomer than ever!"

"Will you take something after your drive?" asked Giulietta, assuming an air of interest with an effort that seemed to crack her voice.

"Oh, Gravellona isn't far. But I should like a little soda water, and, my *dear* Countess, just a touch of brandy in it."

"Good heavens, Blanche, it isn't eleven o'clock!" The Colonel spoke, with irritation bursting badly mended barriers.

The lady turned upon him a seemingly languid look. "Is that *your* hour for feeling exhausted?" she said. "Happy

man. My dear Dorothea, your father has a constitution of iron. I, alas!—am always tired, especially of mornings."

"Nobody ought to take restoratives before lunch," said the Colonel with a great air of authority. Mrs. Sandring beat her foot on the floor. "Where is dear Lady Archibald?" she said. "I understood the dear Archibalds were staying in the house?"

Glances as of conspirators leaped around the company. The languid Baroness had noted them, before Pini spoke, quite unembarrassed:

"The dear Archibalds are out." And, indeed, they were, for Archie had slipped away to the steamer before day-break, and my lady had not yet come back. At any moment the carriage containing her and Konrad might drive up to the door. Dorothea, who perhaps cared most in that company, already fancied she heard the wheels.

"Doubtless you would like to go up to your rooms?" insinuated Pini, with a captivating smile. But Mrs. Sandring preferred to await her soda here.

"How matutinal!" she ejaculated. And then she added: "But doubtless Lady Archibald is accustomed to getting up early." She hated Lady Archie because the latter had been a Biermädel and married above her. "Into our family too," says Mrs. Sandring.

Count Pini frowned ever so slightly. If there was anything he loathed and abhorred in this world where (to quote him) all things are thinkable, it was scenes, scandals of any kind, noise, quarrels, combustions, especially with women concerned. "In my country," he says, "in my time, except at Santa Lucia, things were managed in silence. Everybody was busy sinning in secret and trying not to notice his neighbours' sins. Even the Madonna is not over-observant, or how could she endure existence. What said the fool to King Philip the Second? 'Thy will is law, but where wouldst thou be, if none willed as thou?'"

Pini, then, was exceedingly anxious to get the Archibald unpleasantness smoothed over. "What canst thou so much care?" Giulietta had said, when, a second time, she woke and found him sleepless. "It is as if she were thy sister, this woman of bad taste!"

"Between us all, in these matters," replied Pini, with a sigh, "there remains a bond of blood."

Now, as he stood meditating how to get the addertongued Baroness upstairs, all hesitation was rendered

superfluous, for the carriage with the truants drove up to the door.

They came out, looking noticeably easy and unconcerned. Lady Archibald had informed Konrad a minute before, that she had not the faintest intention of looking otherwise, but when you have not the faintest intention to appear embarrassed, you are liable to do more than you intended.

"Where is Archie?" demanded my lady, the centre of attention, in the middle of the hall.

"Out," said Pini.

"Out! Archibald? At ten in the morning! Impossible! In bed?"

"Out? By himself?" cried Mrs. Sandring.

"Out walking! Lovely country," put in the Colonel.

Lady Archibald looked from right to left, looked at everybody, excepting Konrad. Pini stepped resolutely forward and offered her his arm.

"You must be half dead with fatigue," he said. "Permit me to lead you upstairs." Mechanically she accepted his offer and allowed herself to be led away. There was thunder in the air. Every woman feels it.

"A great nuisance!" remarked Konrad, to the others. "It was a wretched hotel, and of course we were very uncomfortable. Lady Archibald tells me she passed a very bad night——"

"Miladi, your husband has gone," Pini whispered on the staircase. "We know nothing but this: he has gone northward by boat! You must find a note in your room—urgent business. He—he was annoyed last night—foolish husbands—pretty wives—ah, jealousy is always a compliment. The Sandrings know nothing: I should not speak of Motterone—any other story will do as well—better!"

"Archibald gone!" said Lady Dickie. That was all she said. The tears stood in her eyes, but what tears Pini, with all his experience of womankind, could not have told. She trembled slightly on his arm, and he wondered if perchance she knew her husband better than that husband's friends had done.

He was meditating some vague warning about husbands generally, but the altruistic truism remained unspoken, for a great hubbub arose from the hall. They bent over the upper story balustrade.

Archibald stood where his wife had stood two minutes

ago. He was hatless, and that would have been comic, but for the look about his face.

"Ah, my dear fellow!" said Sandring. "Delighted to see you."

"Get along," said Archie.

Lady Archibald was already downstairs. "Why, Joe Miller, how ridiculous you look!" she said. Joe Miller was their most intimate pet-name, the half-forgotten secret of their happiest time.

"I don't doubt that I do," retorted Archie. "Oh, you mean my hat? Well, they can see my forehead all the better."

Not even Sandring smiled. Archie stared round at the others, not looking at his wife. "I had to come back," he said, stupidly, "because, you see, I lost my hat."

Lady Archibald laughed noisily. "Did it blow into the water?" she said. "Well, get thee another and we'll go for a walk."

"It blew overboard," said Archie, still to the company. "And I got out at—what's the place?—Intra—and came back."

"There, then, was the tile loose," cried Dickie. But Archibald did not grin.

"At Intra is an admirable old man with antiquities," began Pini. "You should have gone and seen him. We will all go and see him. Sandring, you are a great connoisseur; you must help me to buy something genuine for these ladies—a reliquary, a cross; he has wonderful objects of religion. Who will go with us? Come, Sandring—come, Herr Konrad——"

"Stay a minute," exclaimed Archie. "I want you all to stay, who were here last night. I don't mind about you, Sandring, you're a sort of cousin, and a good fellow too! I want you to hear me."

His manner was so excited that Lady Archibald timidly placed her hand on his arm. "Come away with me, Archie; you aren't well," she said gently. He shrank as she touched him, but he let the hand lie.

"All of you know," he went on, "what this woman was when I married her—why I married her, how I married her, what my people at home did to me—oh, I'm not saying the things to shame her, you all know all about it—I'm only putting things together for what I want to prove."

"Archie, dear Archie, come away!" pleaded his wife.

"Last night I—I—well, I suppose I made a fool of myself. I'm the sort of fellow that makes a fool of himself. All his life long. I'm doing it again this morning. I went away and—and you see, I've come back. I'm doing it again this morning."

"Then don't you think you might leave off?" suggested Konrad. He spoke sweetly. He was green to the lips.

"So, you see," continued Archie, looking straight at Dorothea, "I think I have a right to say I love her. That is all I want to prove; I have a right to say I love her."

Lady Archibald drew her skirts about her. "Of course thou lovest me, silly old cat, and I thee. But of this folly we have sufficient, and I carry you upstairs, my Archibald, so!" She caught him by the wrist and would have pulled him forward, but he wrenched himself away.

"I love her," he said. "I come back to her. Ah, Madame de Roden, will you understand me? Will you help us. I love her, and she is a woman of the streets!"

His wife dropped his arm and fell back a step or two, and stood staring at him.

"All I want," Archie hurried on, "is for you all, you who know what's happened, to promise me silence. It's a little thing—you don't want to talk, do you?—and it makes such a lot of difference to us; I'm an awful chatterbox, but I think I could hold my tongue about another fellow's affairs, if he asked me. I want you all to say you will, and Egon, I want you to talk to yonder brute; I can't. I could only kill him, and what's the use? It seems such an idiotic settlement. And we'll go away together." For the first time he looked at his wife. "Some day, perhaps, Dickie, things 'll look different, and Madame de Roden will be willing to speak to you again, and she'll help us to get things straight."

"To-day—this moment!" cried Dorothea, starting up, "if there is anything I can do or say——"

But Archie shook his head. "We'd better get away now," he said. "After all, I daresay a lot of the fault is mine. I was thinking of that on the boat. Life isn't all a stupid joke, and, you see, I was a Tomfool." It was now his turn to hold out his hand. "I've come to fetch you," he said. "Come away!"

She had stood staring at him, immovably. Now, as he drew nearer, she fell back against a pillar—then suddenly sprang forward and, before he or any one could dream of

her intention, she had struck him, with the palm of her hand, on the face.

"Tomfool!" screamed the ex-Biermädel, "Tomfool! Dost thou insult me, because I am a woman? Here, before all these goodies—ah, precious!—thou sayest vile things of me, and every one grins. Ape! There is but one answer to idiots as thou! One beats them. Would but I had the fist of a man!"

"Mrs. Sandring," said the Colonel in a very loud voice, "you and I are going upstairs at once."

Mrs. Sandring laughed shrilly. "No, indeed," she retorted, "I am vastly interested. Lord Archibald, what is going to happen next?"

"This!" cried Dickie, turning on the lady, "that I'm going to leave the house, as the Count di Pini-Pizzatelli invites to us the Baroness Blanche de Fleuryse. There are people I *will not* meet in future." She swept a deep curtsy to her husband. "You are one."

"A man that can say vile things of a woman," she continued, once more screaming. "A liar about his wife! A lying, lie-ful liar! Thou wouldst be rid of me? So be it then. I am sick of thee and thy poor Tomfool. But why lie with lying lies? I will never forgive thee thy lies. Will some gentleman escort me to the hotel? Monsieur Konrad, prove the Tomfool that he lies!" Konrad stepped thoughtfully forward. Well, undoubtedly, she was good-looking, with fleshly, lustful good looks. He offered her his arm, and they went out at the hall-door together.

Archibald, ever since the blow had struck him, had remained staring stupidly at the woman who had dealt it—and another. Signor Pini now came forward, and took his hand in a very un-English manner, and led him away.

"We will go into my room for a little," said Signor Pini. "My dear Milord, will you forgive my saying that you have a little mismanaged this most delicate business? But the gods have been gracious to you: they have arranged it for you far better than you had any right to expect."

"Don't humbug me, please, signore," said Archie.

"Nothing is farther from my intentions. I am an old man. I have known much trouble and many compensations. I permit myself to pity you deeply, and to wish you joy. May I say a thing that, I believe, should be said to-day, not to-morrow?"

"Fire away!" said Archie.

"You will not slay me? Life is so valuable to the old."

"Oh, don't fool me, Count! Everybody seems to think I'm made for foolery only."

"You are young: your life is 'refeasible.' You have done a foolish thing: the gods love you. I would say that you are well rid of—her. Two practical jokers is too much in one family."

"God knows I never played her a practical joke like that," said poor Archie.

Signor Pini lightly balanced his appreciative finger-tips.

"Your Protestant religion," he said, "is lacking in femininity."

CHAPTER XVI.

"You will go at once," said Mrs. Sandring, "and kill this woman's responsible man."

"I have no objection," replied her husband coolly, "for, in fact, she insulted me quite as much as you, and before my daughter! But the difficulty will be just at present to find out who the personage is."

"I have always understood," said the lady, "that the laws of duelling are precise on every particular point. My cousin, the Count di Casa Profonda——"

"Was killed in single combat, so he ought to know," remarked the Colonel languidly.

"Lewis, if there is to be any mocking at relations, it seems to me that some of yours——"

"I make you a present of all but Dorothea. But where is the mocking? I said 'skilled.'"

"Leave such poor quibbles to the weak wretch downstairs. I tell you he deserved what he got."

"Already I have heard you make the remark, and have not expressed dissent. Can you let me have a cigarette? This is a first-rate balcony for smoking. Every man deserves what he gets from a woman. For why? Because, after all, the bondage is self-chosen."

"Not always," said the Baroness.

"Not always." The Colonel sighed.

"Talking of our dear Dorothea," said the Baroness (though no one had mentioned her), "does it not strike you that she, dear child, has managed to create an extraordinary *milieu* for herself in a very short time? One would like to contrast Brodryck and Baveno. How interesting to see the dear ladies at Giulietta's dinner table."

The Colonel smiled his new little weary smile. "In low-necks," he said. And added: "The child is not to blame."

Mrs. Sandring—the new name and the old seem to suit various phases of her present development—Mrs. Sandring sat up. "Not to blame," she cried, "for marrying Egon?"

Who is? Oh, I know: I am. I am to blame for everything that happens nowadays. Wet or fine; cold or hot. I am like the French government."

"But more stable," said the Colonel, "government in any case: be content with that. We should be perfectly happy, my dear Blanche, if only you would abandon your horrible habit of catching one up. You cannot imagine what bad taste it is."

Mrs. Sandring rose, very magnificent, with mountains of gold on her big head. "You accuse me of nagging?" she demanded.

The Colonel shrugged his shoulders. "I never, that I remember, accused any woman of anything," he said, "except of not loving me enough, or some one else more. What man accuses women? We love them, and leave them, and die for them, but we never take them seriously enough to accuse them. Accusation presupposes criminal intention—and a judge."

"Sandring, when you sit arguing like that and smoking, you are odious."

"What a pity, for, excepting play, it is pretty well my only remaining pleasure, since my stomach began to go. You must bear with me a little. I was always mild to women, and mildly treated by them. I am accustomed to having my own way."

"You have told me that a dozen times, and it needed no telling."

"There is a fundamental difference," continued Sandring, lazily reasoning to the Borromean islands. "Woman is God's creation, spoilt by the Devil; man is God's creation, spoilt by woman. There is wonderful living truth in the Hebrew story."

"Lewis, you are profane. I don't like the way you speak about the Bible."

"I suppose it is the Bible," said Sandring thoughtfully. "Have you ever seen a Bible, Blanche?"

"I have seen the little book your daughter gave me," Mrs. Sandring replied, in a softened voice. "I am a better Christian than you, Lewis. I never miss my Easter duties, and I say my 'Ave Maria' every night. What do you do? You wear an amulet for Monte Carlo."

"It is not that," replied the Colonel, also in gentler accents. "Pepita gave me the little leaden Virgin when she died."

"What?"

The Colonel nodded softly to the Borromean islands.

"Tell me all about it this instant! You never told me a word."

"There are many things I have not told thee, my dearest. Some day, perhaps, when thou hast been very good to me, very kind and sweet—and hast played a soft hand through my curly locks—as she used to do—I will tell thee about Pepita."

"Bluebeard!"

"Ah, yes; you would have the key!"

The Baroness laughed. "Well, yes," she said. "I admit I do love to hear stories of that kind. I have told you more about my past than you have me, Colonel."

"I could have dispensed with the pleasure," answered Sandring coldly. "By-the-bye, I beg of you, be careful what you say to Dorothea."

She flushed. She opened her lips for an angry retort, but checked it. "Thank you," she only said, and went and sat down with her back to the view, powdering round cheeks that were hot with resentment.

Sandring, having finished his cigarette and cast a couple of uncomfortable glances at his consort, strolled downstairs in search of somebody to talk to. Attracted by the sound of singing, he looked into the music-room, and approved of

"Non, non, ce n'est pas,—ce n'est pas l'alouette."

"Very good, indeed," he said. "I heard Patti and Reszké in that at the Paris Opera years ago. It is really the only good thing in the whole composition. Except, perhaps,

"Votre tourterelle!"

"You might sing that for me, Roden, while the Countess is resting." He walked to the window.

Gardez bien la belle !
Qui vivra, verra !
Votre tourterelle,
Vous échappera ! "

"Yes—well, it is a page's song—rather too heavy for a man's voice like yours. You sing the big passion bits better. And you don't appreciate the danger. Ah, Countess, if you were to try?"

"Gardez bien la belle!"

"That is it—that is it. With you one feels the bird is on the wing! Ah, you understand the risk! These women! Archie should sing it. Poor Archie. 'Qui vivra, verra! Votre tourterelle——' But you, Egon, are the placid, perfect husband, content in possession. Forty years hence you will sing—

'My old wife's a good old creature.'

Do you know it?"

"No," said Egon shortly.

"It was a music-hall song of my youth. Forty years hence it will have come round again." The Colonel strolled out into the hall, and Egon closed the door, not without alacrity, behind him.

Dorothea sat in the winter garden, hidden out of sight, but her father found her.

"My dear child, I am so delighted to—Dorothea, you have been crying."

"No, father, not crying."

"I thought veracity was the chief of your numerous virtues?"

"If I had cried, I should surely have noticed it."

"Well, not necessarily. Perhaps you did not reach the pocky-hanky stage. For all that, your eyes are red. What have you been crying about?"

"Nothing, I assure you."

"The usual answer where the cause is very bad. The first time I encounter my daughter after her wedding-morn, her eyes are red. A pleasant experience for a doting father. Is this all that Egon——"

"Please don't; Egon is perfect."

"If I thought you believed that, I should tremble for your future. My dear, I am fonder of you than ever. Can't you tell me why your eyes are red?"

"Father, you don't like the man!"

"Nonsense, I like everybody. And if you mean Roden——"

"Of course not. There is no sort of secret about the matter. I don't think I've been crying. I had a letter from aunt Mary this morning, that is all. It made me feel a little homesick. And she says that Mark Lester is very ill. I am very sorry for them all."

"How sad!" said the Colonel gratefully.

"You see he has just been inducted as minister of
D.

Brodryck, and he preached his first sermon last Sunday, and it was very fine, they all say. Aunt Mary says it was full of feeling, and uncle Tony, who is a great judge of sermons, and remembers all the good ones, declared it was the most eloquent discourse he ever heard."

"Has uncle Tony's account of it affected you to tears?" grinned the Colonel. "Gad, you must read me that sermon, Dolly!"

"Don't, father. Oh, father, after it was over, in the vestry, he was taken ill. He spat blood. They say he must not preach again for months."

"Poor chap!" said the Colonel.

"Think of his mother and sisters dependent on him. I believe they are very poor." Her voice trembled, and again her eyes filled without her knowing it.

"We must get him away at once from that beastly climate," said the Colonel sympathetically. "If I spent a month of November in Holland or England, I should certainly spit blood. Anybody would, I should think. I mean, I suppose they all do if they've a tendency. You and I must get him to some health resort first, and then ship him off to the Cape. I've met dozens of old men there who'd lost quarts of blood in their youth. And they earn as many golden pounds there as they would get florins in Holland. Cheer up. Write home about sending your Mark to Davos. I'll willingly help."

"Father, how good you are!"

"Bosh, I've got heaps of money just now. Don't frown, Dolly; you must learn to accept the inevitable. The system, as far as it goes, has been wonderfully successful. I am greatly obliged to Pini for taking me into partnership. I assure you he is a man of very great—there, there, we mustn't quarrel. I hardly consider myself his personal debtor; he has an intense admiration for you."

"I am sorry," said Dorothea.

"And surely you do not object to spoiling the Egyptians?"

Dorothea knew that Mark Lester, at any rate, would rather die naked in the desert. "You are so kind," she said. "We must see. I have written a few words already proposing that he should come here."

"Here!"

"Pallanza and Locarno are full of lung-patients. And he might begin with us at Bel Respiro. Of course Egon

would be quite willing to have him. He is always telling me to invite my Dutch relations. I wanted to go to him now, but I did not like to disturb his singing."

"Humph!"

"He hates to be disturbed at his practising. He says it puts him out."

"Even when he is practising alone?" demanded the Colonel viciously.

"Especially when he is practising alone."

"But this young man is not a relation!"

"He is exactly the same thing. I have always called him my brother."

"Well, I think he would be just as comfortable at the hotel."

"Oh, no, no! I could not bear to think of Mark at the hotel, and all our rooms empty. It would seem absurd. Besides, he would not go, father. He is rather proud. I do not think he would like to take our money. And so unnecessarily. I know, because uncle Tony wanted to pay for his university education; and he lived in a garret and gave lessons."

"To me that sort of thing is insufferable!" exclaimed the Colonel.

"So uncle Tony said. But uncle Tony likes him very much, father, and I'm sure you would. He is not at all conceited—quite simple; and when aunt Mary gave him a present for a trip up the Rhine, he very gladly went."

"I am nonplussed," said the Colonel. "But, Dorothea, let me speak of things I understand about. You have known this young fellow all your life: you have the memories of twenty years in common with him: your husband you first met a twelvemonth ago. I shall not insult you or Egon by suggesting that your husband could ever grow jealous of any one—don't think I mean that—but accept as a general truth the fact that all husbands take a violent dislike to the men who knew their wives intimately before they did."

Dorothea's eyes flashed. "But, father——"

"Dolly, you may reason till Doomsday: you can't change human nature. Your great mistake is that you assume what it ought to be and not what it is. I love you. I rejoice, child, to see you accumulate heavenly treasure, but I tremble to think how you mix it up with the earthly and refuse to make any provision for moths."

"What do you mean, father?"

Colonel Sandring burst out laughing. "I am not as good a preacher," he said, "as Mark Lester. I suppose I get my texts wrong. Stop at Bel Respiro, Dolly, and let Mr. Lester go to Davos."

Dorothea got up. At that moment her father seemed to her low, corrupt: Monte Carlo, Madame de Barvielle, a host of unworthy memories, painfully fresh, rose up before the soul of aunt Mary's pupil.

"You wrong Egon cruelly," she said. "You misjudge us altogether, father. There are things——" she stopped.

"Of which I cannot judge?" continued the Colonel with outward coolness. "My dear Dolly, the Devil can quote scripture to his purpose. I believe it is said somewhere that even God is a jealous God. Jealousy, therefore, may well be a virtue. Were you really never, for one instant, jealous?"

He faced round at her. She blushed crimson. He kindly looked away.

"I know a husband who isn't jealous," he said gloomily, "and I rather pity him." Whereupon he took out a cigarette and walked away.

Dorothea sank down to a tumult of new considerations, repeatedly pierced—as swift clouds break before swifter lightning—by the consciousness of that new sensation, experienced with sharp shame on the night before last.

She was angry with her father. Why did he thus always sully her young ignorance with world-worn words that splashed, like mud? And her soul rebelled for sake of the husband she loved and admired beyond any little drawing-room tattle.

Then she thought of the sick man at Brodryck, whom the doctors had ordered immediately south. She weighed her shrewd father's facile arguments, her own knowledge of the minister's character, till she felt convinced, with increasing anxiety, that Mark Lester would never consent to come.

"He will die over there in the cold and the mist," she said to herself bitterly. "His poor mother and sisters! He is all they have got."

She sat spinning out her gloomy thoughts till suddenly there flashed across them the memory of his promise, that summer, to herself. It brought her to her feet again, with a shock of joyous resolve. She left the conservatory, her

heart full of sweet thoughts of her husband. At the music-room door she paused, with her hand on the door-knob.

"Adieu—de cet adieu si douce est la tristesse!"

"Still Romeo and Juliet," she murmured, smiling. "How well their voices go together!"

The post had gone out. She got her hat and walked down to the little local telegraph station, accompanied by poor Archie's Italian greyhound, "Flirt."

"Come at once. For my sake," she telegraphed.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOMeward serenely she walked, with God's benediction upon her.

The weather was beautifully bright: the sky a brilliant blue. The dark-green cypresses pointed heavenward: the faded olives straggled along the rocky ground. Dorothea nodded to the ragged little black-eyed children, and thought of the lodge-gates at Brodryck. The dog ran away up a mountain-climb. She went after him, through a bit of wood, towards the house.

On a stone ledge, in this coppice, a disconsolate figure was sitting, kicking at pebbles with aimless foot. Lord Archibald's boy-face looked up, as the dog darted forward.

"By George! I thought it was she!"

Dorothea paused beside him.

"You're so like her, you know! I mean—I mean," he stammered, "in figure, of course—so fair, too. I don't mean you're like her, you understand." He floundered hopelessly, red and wretched.

"I understand perfectly," she said, though refusing mentally to admit any similarity whatever. "Lord Archibald, I am so very sorry."

He sat fondling the dog. "For what?" he asked. "Because she went away or because she's not coming back? Do you know, I could hardly say. Pini tells me I ought to be delighted. But that's all nonsense. Now you, you're a good woman—do you think I ought to want her back?"

"N—n—no," said Dorothea.

"But you don't mind my feeling awfully sorry she's gone?"

Dorothea laid her hand next to his on the dog's sympathetic forehead.

"Look here—this is what she writes to me. Shall I read it? No, take it and read it yourself."

Dorothea cracked the bit of paper in the silence of the wood.

"Please send me Lucille"—("That's her maid," put in Archie)—"with my things. I hoap you will let me have my jools, tho' after this mourning you are caddie enuf for anny thing. Your money I want not. Send me not preedjings from Sainte Dorrotea. Besites, there is no neet: I will mary the only man that behafed like a gentleman this mourning."

"By Jove, I forgot there was that bit about you!" cried Archibald.

Dorothea held out the letter.

"Marry!" she said. "Marry Konrad! She is mad."

"She'll marry him, if she wants to. She married me."

"Marry him! It is utterly impossible!"

"And why, pray?" demanded Archie huffily. "I should have thought the solution would appeal to your religious sense!"

"Marry Konrad! Impossible," repeated Dorothea without heeding him. In violent agitation she walked away down the slope, towards the house. "Konrad!" she said aloud. "Marry Konrad! That woman!" She hurried to the music-room, resolved to disturb Egon at all costs. It was empty. She passed through the smoking-room, coming across Pini.

"Well, madame, what say you of these complications?"

"God help us all out of them," she answered, hastening away.

Signor Pini smiled after her. "That is so like these religious people," he murmured. "Always it is the Deity who must wipe up the mess."

On the stairs she met Egon limping rapidly down.

"Dolly, I was looking for you everywhere," he cried in excitement. "I've got something to tell you."

"I know it already," she answered. "But it is impossible! It can never be."

He started back, offended: "What on earth do you mean?"

"She is a wicked woman, Egon! I do not believe a word she says."

Quite a new expression of disfavour came into his eyes.

"One would almost think you did not want it to come true," he said. "But I disagree with you. The Countess Pini seems to me to have the kindest heart."

"I am talking of Lady Archibald, who is going to marry Konrad!"

"Bosh. Come up to your room and I will tell you all about it."

"I also have things I want to tell you about. Egon, something has happened——"

But the agitation of his manner stopped her.

"Dolly, the Countess Pini knows of a way in which my leg could be cured, she thinks!"

Her face did not respond immediately. Her first idea was of Lourdes. She knew that the Pinis patronised Lourdes.

"My God, one would think you did not care!"

"Come and sit beside me, my husband, and tell me what she says."

He obeyed. "There is a man," he went on rapidly, "a masseur, at Montreux, who does wonders. He cures people, it appears, that no physician has been able to help. Countess Pini saw a young man arrive there from Russia—his father was a general—the young man had injured his ankle three years ago—they had been everywhere; he was an only son, intended for a soldier. He was quite lame, and this man, the masseur, said, 'the hurt is in the knee, not in the ankle'—in three weeks he could walk about, in five he was cured."

"We must find out more about it," said Dorothea. And she added: "It would be splendid, but you have tried so much."

"I know. But the stories she tells me of this man, Barbolat, are amazing. She has seen them occur: it is no hearsay evidence. She wanted to speak about it before, but she didn't like to. She thought at once he could cure me."

"She might have spoken to me first."

"Why?" He opened his eyes.

"Has she been there herself? Is she ill?"

"Oh, a rich woman's ailments. She goes to him once a year, for a couple of weeks. He does her nerves good. And she meets half the royalties and semi-royalties of Europe in his rooms."

"That is an attraction," said Dorothea.

"Dolly, you are most unsympathetic. Why do you so dislike Madame Pini?"

"Dislike is not the word, but I admit that we do not sympathise. You must bear with me a little; everything

has always been so different. Think of Giulietta Pini at Brodryck." Her voice was tired and miserable.

He drew her head down on his shoulder and kissed her once or twice. "Think how splendid it would be if I could walk like other men," he said.

She was at a loss what to answer, anxious to show sympathy, afraid to encourage expectations she could not share.

"We must enquire about it," she repeated. "There was a lady at the Nice hotel, who used to spend all her autumns at Montreux. I have her address. I could write to her."

"But the Countess knows better than any one," he cried impatiently. "I tell you she goes to him every year. What's the use of asking other people, who probably know nothing about it?"

"Well, we must find out from her then, all we can. Everybody always knows of some infallible cure. Egon, I want it as much as you. Only, I am so afraid of possible disappointment. You have consulted such great people. We must find out about this new man. Later on we can always decide."

He started to his feet. "Later on!" he cried. "Later on! One can see you were never in my condition. Every step that I take is a sword-thrust. Madame Pini was saying she saw the suffering in my face: that was what gave her courage to speak."

She was cruelly hurt. "I see it also," she said.

Her tone checked him, and he added more calmly: "This life is living death. I would give anything—twenty years of existence—to be like other men!"

She followed him to the window: he was looking out, with hot face. "Egon," she said, "you have always stopped me when I tried to speak of your trial, till I did not dare to begin. And now you have spoken to her: I could not know."

He turned quickly: "Are you jealous?" he said, in scorn.

"No, not jealous. Why should I be jealous? What do you mean by jealous? Only very, very sad."

"And why, dearest, should you be sad?"

She was silent. For, not even to herself, could she have put her thoughts into satisfactory words.

"We will go to Montreux," he said. "And I shall get cured. And all will be well."

"Yes, we will go to Montreux."

"She has told me marvels—of just such cases as mine. Dorothea, you must not think me weak. Think what the change would mean to me. I could go into the army, like the young Russian, after all."

"You would like that very much?"

"For us there is no other profession. It is all the difference between being nothing, nobody, and the possibility of achieving all."

She began to realise how little she had understood him. She had thought him happy in his art-studies, content with the prospect of work in some Government office.

"Yes, we will go to Montreux," she said, her heart full of dread.

"At once."

She started. For she also had her tale to tell, and had hitherto forgotten about it, or, rather, her thoughts had not had time to revert to it.

"Egon, I had bad news from home this morning," she said, uncomfortably. "Mark Lester—you remember?—is very ill."

"Yes, I remember. Poor chap!"

"It is dreadful. My foster-brother!"

"Oh, that is why you were sad. What makes you call him your foster-brother?"

"The aunts used often to call him so. I have telegraphed to him, Egon, asking him to come to us here."

"Whatever did you do that for?" he cried, amazed.

"The doctors order him south at once. He has spat blood. It is very dreadful. Of course they are quite poor. Egon, you have constantly been telling me to ask my relations out."

"Yes, yes, you are perfectly right. Only this is rather awkward about Barbolat! You see, I shall have no peace until the man has said: yes or no. I had given up all idea of a cure long ago, when I returned with my father from Paris. Now it has suddenly all come back, all the uncertainty and expectancy. I must have his answer. Giulietta Pini says he always decides at once: 'I can cure you' or 'I can't cure you,' and he keeps you or sends you away."

"Egon, what am I to do? I can't telegraph to Mark not to come!"

"I must go alone." He was looking out of the window, fixedly.

"I can't let you go alone on such an errand as this."

He frowned. "I am not a fool or a child. A child on its way to the dentist. It cannot be helped. As you have asked this man, and he is ill, you must receive him. To-morrow I shall run through the Gotthard, and work my way round to Montreux. As soon as I know anything, I shall telegraph. Then we can see."

"But what can we see? I shall not be able to leave him alone at Bel Respiro."

"Then you must leave me alone at Montreux!"

"Egon, you are unkind. Oh, what can I do!"

"I am quite unable to decide," he said, and limped out of the room.

"I shall stay to receive him. I must stay to receive him now," she exclaimed. Her lips trembled, but her eyes were set firm. She paced up and down the room. "For my sake! I have telegraphed 'For my sake.' He is seriously ill. How can I then now telegraph to him: 'Don't come?'"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"FATHER, this woman Archibald says she is going to marry Konrad!"

The Colonel stopped in his languid amusement of blowing cigarette smoke at Giulietta's cockatoo. "Well, my dear, I suppose that is what you would call 'right'?"

"It is infamous. It is disgraceful. Let her go back to her own husband."

"And not sully the name of von Roden? Very true. But do not alarm yourself. Konrad does not look to me the sort of man to do anything quite as stupid as that. Besides, there is plenty of time; they are not yet divorced."

"But a woman like that can make a man do anything."

The Colonel sighed. "True, a bad woman can make a man commit any folly, and a good woman can—do the same. That is your step-mother coming downstairs."

Mrs. Sandring drew her arm through Dorothea's and led her away into palm-groves under glass. The air was hot and stuffy here; Dorothea avoided this corner of the villa to which the newcomer had taken an instinctive liking.

"My dear Dorothea," said Mrs. Sandring. "I have not been twelve hours in the house, and already I have a bit of advice to give. Beware of Giulietta!"

Dorothea's heart stood still—she felt it, a sensation she had never felt before. Yet she could not have told why she should care.

"What do you mean?" she asked, honestly. "I have little in common with the Countess Pini. She is not what you all here call 'my style.'"

"Your style is so very superior, my dear Dorothea. Your father says with some truth that you look upon life as an oratorio."

"He flatters me," said Dorothea, flushing. And she turned away and began talking rapid nonsense to Giulietta's black imp of a tailless "skipper" dog.

Mrs. Sandring lifted her many-ringed hands.

"Did it, then, itty-titty-pritty!"

"Nonsense," cried Mrs. Sandring sharply. "My dear Dolly, don't be a fool!"

Her step-daughter resented the apostrophe, and above all the diminutive. She dropped the small dog to the floor.

"The Countess Pini probably does not like me," she said, eagerly returning to a subject she would have preferred to avoid. "I cannot in fairness object, for I do not like her."

"She does not want you to like her," replied Mrs. Sandring, still in those incisive tones. "She would not care tuppence about any woman's likes or dislikes. What she wants is the admiration of the men." Dorothea faintly shuddered. It seemed to her as if she were listening to kitchen-talk at Brodryck. "Titty, itty, pritty," was all she could find to say to the lapdog scratching at her knees.

"And she gets it," sighed the quondam Baroness.

"She is welcome to it," retorted Dorothea.

The Baroness stared at her new step-daughter for a very long time. Dorothea dropped her eyelids, whereupon the Baroness deliberately lifted tortoise-shell glasses and stared at her all the more.

"Let us go in to lunch," said the Baroness at length.

The reply to Dorothea's telegram came at tea-time. They were all assembled in the Countess's, far too big, "boudoir," which led to her little sanctum beyond. The boudoir was entirely got up in the gaudiest red, white and blue from the Balkans, just as it had been prepared for an illustrious visitor. It was still called the "Knasnia's Chamber," Knasnia being, in Bosnian or Herzegovinian, it appears, the proper word for "Queen."

Even Archie had come in to tea, to brave them, or to feel less deserted. He had announced his intention of going north that night.

When the servant came in with the pale scrap of paper, Archie took it from the salver. "Oh, I beg your pardon! It's for Madame de Roden," he said.

All eyes turned to Dorothea. The Colonel, knowing nothing of her message, jumped to the grateful conclusion that Mark Lester might be dead.

She took the missive and read it. Then she went straight across to Egon and held it out.

"He is coming," she said.

Egon looked at the words. "I am deeply grateful. I start at once."

"Well," he said, a little impatiently, "he has none of the scruples you so much dreaded. He accepts your bounty in a proper spirit."

She spoke slowly: "I asked him to come for my sake. That is what he means by being grateful."

"For your sake? Whatever——?" He checked himself. Giulietta's eyes were on them. "You did quite right," he said.

He saw Giulietta smile, and at that moment he felt that he hated the woman. Everybody was looking at them, or so he fancied. He hated the whole lot; he led his wife away to the farther end.

"I have been thinking about this morning," he said. "I behaved like an idiot! We can perfectly well go to Montreux in the spring. That will always be time enough to hear that he can do me no good."

"No, no, we must not delay."

"Why so suddenly eager?"

"It is a chance. I have been talking to Giulietta. Egon, supposing the man were to die!"

"Oh, rubbish!" he said, forcibly putting her earnestness away from him.

"I must think of something. I must arrange something. Something is sure to turn up."

"Mrs. Micawber!" he answered, laughing.

But she did not understand him. Mrs. Sandring spoke behind them: "Lend the Colonel and me your pretty villa; I will receive your young parson there."

They both turned hurriedly, and Dorothea saw Mark Lester at lunch with Mrs. Sandring! "I must think; I must arrange," she repeated nervously. "Egon, you believe, do you not, in my willingness to please you?"

"So much so," he answered, "that I must be more careful what sacrifices I demand."

"A gentleman," said the butler, just a faint touch more loudly than usual, "to speak to Milord Archibald alone."

Archie rose hastily and allowed himself to be conducted to the library.

He started back at the door, but the butler quickly closed it behind him.

"One moment!" said Konrad, of the sallow face.

"There can be no need," replied Archibald, much agitated, "of any conversation between us."

"You think not? Do not call it conversation, then. Call it remarks from me to you." Konrad pulled at his long moustache, smiling faintly. He was admirably frock-coated; his hair was very thin at the top.

"There can be little cause for those," said Archie, very red.

"You are mistaken. It appears absolutely necessary that I should come and call you a cad."

"Are you crazy?" cried Archibald, with a nervous look at the bell-pull.

"They always say that when they have rendered plain speech inevitable," remarked Konrad deprecatingly, looking out of the window and speaking gently as to himself. "As for me, I detest these vulgar—how shall I call them?—downrightnesses, but what can I do? All day I have waited patiently at the hotel for some message, and now I hear that Lord Archibald intends to leave to-night for the north!"

"Good God, do you mean to say that you want to kill me because you have robbed me of my wife?" cried the young Englishman.

"You have chosen to insult your wife, a woman—that is your business. You seem not to have observed that the insult meant nothing unless it hit me as well?"

Archibald's face grew violet; he advanced upon his antagonist with clenched fists. "Hypocrite and liar!" he began.

"Silence!" said the other, falling back a step, his frock-coat very tight. "That is quite enough, and all the rest so useless! To whom can my brother address himself? Shall we say Signor Pini?"

"Why not?" said poor Archie.

"Our interview, then, is at an end. You would greatly oblige me by leaving me in possession, for a few moments, of this room." Archibald walked out, and Konrad immediately sent the butler for Egon.

"I refuse to have anything to do with it!" declared Egon.

Konrad stared at him. "Have you forgotten your A. B. C.?" demanded the younger brother.

"I don't care. This is not a decent duel. Why can't you leave the young chap alone?"

"Of course, if you insist, I must apply to the Colonel."

"You are bent, then, on slaying him?"

"Egon, I fear your intercourse with your very good wife is spoiling you for the ordinary etiquette of society. I am not 'bent upon slaying him,' as you graciously choose to put it. On the contrary, I am conscious of the fact that his death would be a nuisance."

"Then I understand you still less."

"But I am bent upon teaching him a lesson, the young brute."

"There is no need to fight him."

"No need to fight him, when he has *publicly* accused me, a Prussian officer, of insulting his wife? Egon, you must be out of your senses. Say at once, that you prefer to fight shy of duels! True, you are a civilian, an invalid! I can quite enter into your feeling, where your own brother is concerned. You feel nervous. I will ask Colonel Sandring."

"'Sdeath!" said Egon between his teeth. "Tell me what you want done, and how."

"You may prefer to know that he just now called me a liar and a hypocrite, and attempted to strike me?"

"That is enough. I wish he had not done that, for it gives you too good a pretext. Yet I can understand him—and I like him for it."

Konrad's green turned livid. "Say your say," he answered. "You are my brother: you know you are safe. By-the-bye, may I ask, before we separate, did you write that letter to the Head?"

"I did."

"Well, I thank you for that. This may be our last conversation, and I thank you for that. Frankly, I should not have done it for you."

"It's all right. After you have killed Archie, you may marry his wife to-morrow."

Konrad swore at his brother. "Are you really too stupid to understand," he said, "that I want to wound Archibald Foye in the arm or the leg? Then his wife will stop with him and nurse him, I presume. Yes, I think there will be a reconciliation. The worst thing that could happen to me would be his death." He spoke quite coolly, reviewing his little plan as he put it into words.

"I have nothing to do with your disgusting considerations," replied Egon, much relieved, for Konrad had an immense reputation as a marksman. "You ask me to be

your second in an encounter with a man who has called you a liar, and I cannot refuse you. Whom has Archibald chosen? Pini? I will go to him at once."

"I must tell you," said Egon to Pini, "that my sole object, in becoming Konrad's second, is to do my best for Archibald Foye."

"Unusual, but not unreasonable," replied Pini. "Will you smoke?"

"The only possible weapon is pistols. Archibald can use no other. The range not too far."

"Ha!" cried Pini, amazed.

"It gives the worse shot a better chance," explained Egon uncomfortably.

Pini paused, in thought. "I understand perfectly," he said. "I understand as if you had told me all. Your brother wishes only to wing Lord Archibald, and you wish to ensure this result. I am an old man—since I have grown rich, I have felt much older—but I am not yet senile. I understand. Surely, a brother as second is an undesirable thing, against my conceptions of duelling?"

"There is no one else. I cannot implicate my father-in-law," replied Egon stiffly.

"The Colonel might not take your view. Well, according to your lights, you are a good man, von Roden." The old Italian smiled, a shrewd little smile. "Ah, Santa Maria! Open thine eyes on the world, young man—open thine eyes on the world!"

"To revert to the matter on hand," answered Egon more stiffly still, "I should say, each of the combatants to fire once."

"Impossible!" cried Pini angrily. "Really, von Roden, you know as well as I do, that a man cannot be his brother's second! Why don't you send me the Colonel?"

"I insist, absolutely, on one shot only," replied Egon, for he hoped that his brother's single bullet, aimed at the arm, might pass on one side.

"Insist! Absolutely!" replied Pini, and his delicate nostrils swelled.

"Count Pini," exclaimed Egon, in a burst of frankness, "there are points on which we disagree, but there are points on which we agree. I know I ought not to be my brother's second. When I tell you that I am trying to prevent a murder, I am sure of your aid."

The impressionable Italian caught the young German's

hand. "Per Bacco, you are right!" he said. "The heathen gods and the classic sentiments all honest men have in common. There is a point where all meet and understand each other. I understand thee, Egon von Roden!"

On the following morning, then, in the little wood beyond Forleone—in the little primrose-dell known to all who have stayed any time at Baveno—the four men met and the duel was fought. Count Pini's servants remained stationed a few hundred paces off, with the village apothecary, who was garrulous and important, and immensely pleased.

Lord Archibald looked outwardly calm, but very serious, and rather sad. He gave two letters to Pini, one for his mother, one for his wife. "I have nothing to say to any one," he said, fixing his pale eyes straight on Konrad, who stood sullen and correct, "excepting that I never, in all my life, had the faintest intention of injuring any one."

The antagonists took their places, first fire having fallen to Archibald by lot. In the expectant silence,

"Count—Pini!" said Archibald, standing ready. A smile flickered over his features; one wonders, did he, at that moment, recognise the pun?

His bullet soared wide over his adversary's head.

"One—two—three," said Pini.

Konrad's pistol rose, with a sure rush—he fired.

At that moment Archibald swayed a couple of inches to the right—they all saw him—the next instant he was down on the ground, and the seconds were at his side.

"The bullet is through his breast," said Egon. "Signor Pini, would you call for your doctor?"

The apothecary came bustling up, and arranged, and examined, and made a great fuss. "The lung is perforated," he said. "There must be internal hemorrhage," and began giving a lot of details he could not possibly know.

"He is not seriously hurt?" questioned Egon.

"He is a dead man," replied the apothecary with infinite relish, and he added, being an advanced "revolutionary," "The Milord is no longer a Milord."

But Egon had rushed across to Konrad.

"He dodged, and I killed him," said Konrad, unmoved.

"You lie in the dead man's face!" retorted Egon hotly.

"He swayed: it was but a natural sway of the body. If you could not help it, nor could he! Let him alone, and get away, while you can."

"That is true," replied Konrad calmly. "I must get through the Gotthard at once. Good-bye then, dear boy. It is a most unpleasant incident. I do not doubt he will recover, and his dodging causes me a lot of trouble. What annoys me most is that he won the toss-up. I have always been so lucky in that hitherto. Supposing my luck begins to abandon me? What a good thing for you." He had spoken, while putting on his coat: he now held out his hand, but Egon did not take it.

"Wh—ew!" said Konrad, "it is war, then, between thee and me? So be it. Ta—ta!"

Meanwhile Archibald was being moved to the little inn at Forleone, but before he reached it, he had ceased to breathe.

CHAPTER XIX.

"My wife!" said Egon. He ejaculated the two words, to himself, in German, but Count Pini had a smattering of many European tongues.

"Undoubtedly," replied Pini, leaning back in the wagonette.

"It is always the woman who is the serious complication," he added. "You had better ask the Colonel to make your peace."

Roden bit his lip with annoyance at having spoken. "You," he said, "have another task before you. His widow——"

"Will be easier to deal with than your wife. Pardon me, of course it is no business of mine, but I cannot help taking an interest—a fatherly interest—in your ravishing spouse. Ah, la bella donna! Ah, che gran' cuore d'oro! If I were you, I would not return home without stopping at yonder little chapel and offering five francs' worth of candles—but there, it is no use! And even I must admit, that I have often offered and lost, as to-day, before we started, for your Archie." He sighed, a little half-amused, sceptical sigh. "Some day, at Monte Carlo, she will desert me—hush!—the money is very near spent. Nonsense, even omnipotence cannot alter the mathematics of my system."

"Is it really a mathematical certainty?" questioned Egon, for the sake of something to say.

"There is always the ten, but I do not like even to say it, for fear the dear Madonna should find out."

"The ten?"

"Yes, if that comes out twice running, I lose more than—but I beg you, let us not talk of it. Especially not on this unlucky morning. I had promised Our Lady ten per cent. of my earnings. I have punctually paid them—even where there was that doubt about a bad Napoleon, I paid—and, as soon as I am possessed of a competency, I deliver my secret to the world and ruin the whole concern. Up

yonder"—he pointed skywards—"they are waiting for that event to canonize me: 'Santo Bartolommeo Minore!' And perhaps, when I have been dead a hundred years, they will canonize me for it here below. The Slayer of the Dragon of Monte Carlo! A true twentieth century saint!"

"I wonder what you would call a competency," said Egon. "Not, mind you, that I should ever inquire."

"Two million lire," replied Pini promptly. "Eighty thousand lire per annum. Think what the various Monte Carlo princes possess, and then say whether I am extreme? Drive straight up to the hotel door"—this to his coachman—he alighted: "Never be extreme with the gods. The Lady Archibald Foye is at home? I must see her at once."

But Miladi Foye had already gone down to the lake, and thither Signor Pini followed her.

"What I have to tell, I have to tell," he said to her. "I know not whether you are aware that your husband and Konrad von Roden met over yesterday morning's quarrel?" He stopped, and his keen eyes cut into hers.

"Konrad is dead!" she exclaimed.

"No, it is Archie," he answered, for her lack of decorum disgusted him utterly.

She sat down on a bench by the lake-shore; with all his shrewdness he could read nothing into those empty cruel eyes of hers.

"He died like the simple-hearted boy that he was," continued Pini, feeling that he must say something, as he could not immediately slip away. "Simple-hearted and straightforward, doing what he thought was his duty."

"Thank you," she replied, "I knew him as well, I imagine, as you did. I liked him. Yesterday you would have called him a fool."

"Miladi——"

"Never mind. He would probably have called you one. Men are like that. I am not a philosopher. I speak French badly. But all men, with us women, they—how do you call it?—they play into each other's hands. So Archibald is dead. I liked him. It need not have been." In these last five words there pierced suddenly a tone of unmistakable regret.

"It had become inevitable," said Pini pitilessly, and held out her husband's farewell letter to this woman who sat smoothing out her dress.

"He might have killed Konrad," she said, as she took it, and now the disappointment in every accent rang out plain.

"The one could shoot and the other couldn't," replied Pini.

"A man who can't shoot is a woman," replied the widow, and began reading her letter. Her attitude broke down, as her gaze met the dead boy's familiar sprawl. Her colour came and went; she trembled from head to foot in her violent efforts to control herself. She laid the paper down in her lap. There was not a word of reproach in it, only lubberly, mis-spelt love and farewell. "He was accounted a very good shot in the covers," she exclaimed with indignant vehemence, but the tears were coursing down her cheeks.

"It is not the same," replied Pini, shaking his grey old head. "Well, the thing is done, Lady Archibald, and nothing remains now but sackcloth and ashes."

She started to her feet: "Very different things remain to me," she said. "I am a Catholic too, but I am not a dotard."

"Ah, true," he remarked softly, "you will get the most becoming mourning, better than sackcloth, and you will weep in public, not ashes, but pearls."

Their masks were off now; they were telling each other truths. But *finesse* was beyond the Biermädel. She shrugged her comely shoulders and walked away. She walked straight, not hotelwards, but to the Palazzo 'Arriet along the lake-shore, and on the marble steps of the little Palazzo port she stood still, for in one of the pleasure-boats, balancing there, lay Dorothea, enjoying, as often, the bright, brisk morning air.

"Good-morning," said Dickie.

"Good-morning," replied Dorothea gravely.

"It is a beautiful morning."

"Beautiful."

"And you are enjoying it?"

"Very much," replied Dorothea, for she was happy in a reconciliation with Egon.

"You are fortunate to be able to do so."

"Yes."

"Other people have not your advantages."

Dorothea waited, for she trusted that Dickie's unrestful heart was about to unburthen itself of its sins.

"They have not your callousness."

Dorothea's eyes opened wide.

"May I ask what you think, Madame von Roden, of this beautiful morning's beautiful work?"

Suddenly Dorothea realised that her husband had been preoccupied, that he had kissed her with unusual gravity, on going out early "to shoot."

"Has any new misfortune befallen us? Speak quick!"

Lady Archibald stood back. She knew not whether to be touched by the "us" or whether to resent it.

"You are not aware, then," she said, "that Lord Archibald was—murdered this morning by your husband and your brother-in-law."

"What!" screamed Dorothea, and sprang, tottering, to her feet in the boat, that heaved recklessly forwards. "What? What? What?" In a moment she was calm. "Tell me what you mean, what has happened," she cried, and tried, with trembling hands, to steady the boat towards the steps.

"I really believe you do not know," said Lady Archibald. "These two men, your husband and his brother, have this morning killed my husband in what they choose to call a duel."

"But he isn't dead. He's wounded. Oh, my God, make her speak the truth! He isn't dead!" cried Dorothea, as she leaped on to the stairs and came running up them. She approached close to Lady Archibald, almost touched her, then shrank back.

The strain which had held up the other woman seemed suddenly to snap. Lady Archibald broke into mingled imprecations and tears—"It is you and your cursed lot who have done it!" she cried. "God curse you and them! I am a common woman among all you fine bodies—well, you, then, pious, proper-tongued hypocrite—I am glad I have got you—you shall hear honest language for once in your life! We were happy enough till we came amongst you—oh, all pious, you, all high-born and proper! Butter wouldn't melt in your mouth, my fine lady, and your high-souled husband, and the noble Pini, and the Prussian officer, Konrad, and Giulietta—oh Giulietta! And you with your gambler of a father and his baroness—oh you—you go to church and pray—so!"—she folded her hands and cast up her streaming eyes—"you, you are pious, you say 'Lord, 'a' mercy upon us!' the while you are turning men's heads. You, I hate you most of all. He liked you. He was

stupid. See"—she flung her crumpled letter at Dorothea's feet—"he has left you his foolish collections, to arrange them—he says you have a sense of fun!"

She stopped, trembling, and with steady eyes pouring hate at Dorothea:

"‘Of all women I have ever known,’ he would say, ‘Dorothea alone has a real sense of fun.’ Often he has said that to me as a joke. It is because you laughed at his puns. It is easy to laugh once or twice in a twelve-month. I laughed many times, and I could not. God in Heaven, am I a bad woman, and this creature a good one, because she laugheth at ‘puns’?"

Dorothea, shivering away from the other's reckless fury, had fled up the marble ascent through the gardens. And there, by the statue of Cupid, with the broken arrow, among the laurels, she met Egon coming down, in much hesitancy of soul and firmness of countenance, to seek her, from the empty house in front of which was still turning the wagonette that had brought him back.

"Egon, I know all. I know all," she stammered. She leant back against the pedestal.

"It could not be helped," he said: tears that he did not know of stood in his honest eyes.

But she put the lame words aside. "Tell me, at least, that it was not you," she said. Her pride had kept back, face to face with Lady Archibald, the very utterance of his name.

"Me!" he exclaimed in astonishment, and a little annoyance, "Me?" She was glad of the annoyance. "Dorothea, how can you be so foolish? And you say, you know all! A duel had become inevitable between Archibald and Konrad. Poor Archie had called Konrad a liar and hypocrite. Well, then, of course they had to fight; you understand that?"

But Dorothea did not answer.

"I became Konrad's second against my will, it was the best thing I could do for Archie. As *his* second—but of course that was utterly out of the question—I could have done much less. I arranged that only one shot should be fired—Dorothea, are you listening to me?"

But Dorothea did not answer.

"I give you my word of honour it was all an accident. Konrad had declared to me his resolve to hit Archie in the arm. He wanted, I believe, to get rid of the whole business. If Archibald is slightly hurt, he reasoned, his wife

will go back to him and nurse him : there will be a reconciliation—meanwhile Konrad could have got away north.”

Dorothea turned dumb eyes and looked at her husband.

“Then, you see,” the latter went on eagerly, “Archie somehow swerved to the right—Konrad could not help it—he was aiming at the right arm so as to keep clear of the heart——”

“Oh, don’t ! don’t !” shuddered Dorothea, with a cry like an animal that is hurt.

“Dolly, dearest, how could any one do otherwise ? Tell me, as the world is, what could I have done ?”

“He is dead,” she said.

“I tell you it could not be helped. Don’t you see, Konrad——”

She held up her hand as if to keep his words from reaching her.

“He is dead,” she repeated.

“Well, then, tell me what you think I ought to have done.” His voice had quite changed. She looked at him still, steadfastly, and into the look welled all tenderness and sadness, all pleading and love.

“You must pity me, Egon, and bear with me,” she said gently, “and try to make allowances for me. My surroundings have been so different : a year ago, you see, I had never left Brodryck. And now I am here. I cannot understand what you are saying. I only know that, as I understand things, as they understand things among the people I have always lived with, my husband, my loved husband, has helped to commit a murder. That is all I can understand, you see. I do not say I am right. You must try to make allowances for me.” She put up her hands to her forehead, speaking steadily and softly, “I cannot look at it, as yet, in any other light.”

“I am a murderer, then ?” questioned Egon. “That is what it comes to ?”

“Egon, he is *dead*. Think what that means. A few hours ago he was here on earth, and now——”

“Oh, of course, if you put it like that——”

She flashed round at him. “How else can I put it ? Are we heathen ? Is every word that we speak of religion a lie ?”

“Religion has nothing to do with duelling.”

Again there broke from Dorothea’s lips that terrible cry of pain.

"Dolly—Dolly, darling, do be reasonable, I am as sorry as you, but—don't you see?—there are things that have to take their course, while the world is the world. Nobody can alter them. The law of duelling is one, between men of honour. It is *right*. It is as old as creation."

"As old as Cain and Abel," said Dorothea bitterly.

"You are only making me wretched, and yourself, by persisting in treating me as a murderer. Come, let us say no more about the miserable business. Let us forget it. Kiss me!" He held out his hand, but she shrank away from it.

"My God!" he said, and in his mind arose the remembrance of Konrad and himself thus face to face, an hour ago—Is it war, then, between thee and me?

"Do you mean to say you will not take my hand?" he said.

She burst into vehement weeping. "It isn't that," she said. "Egon, I can take your hand, but what does that alter? You say: let us not speak of it: what does that alter? You say, let us forget! Forget what? That, to my sight, be it right or wrong, you have committed murder; that you approve it; that the soul of Archibald Foye is required by Almighty God at your hands; that you say: duelling is no part of religion, as if there were any part of our lives outside religion—that you—you—oh, God, help me—I love you—how can two walk together, unless they be agreed?"

"They cannot," said Egon quickly. "Agree with me, then, dearest! Try to understand."

"To understand," she repeated dully. "That is what I have been saying. Egon, let us go into the house together; let us pray God in Heaven together to forgive you your terrible sin."

He drew himself up. "I have acted," he said, "like a Prussian and a gentleman. Frau von Roden, some day you will say that it was so."

And he left her. She did not cry the word "Never!" after him, though it sprang to her lips. She did not deny; she did not recall. She stood, rooted to the ground, against the broken Cupid, watching all that was left of her happiness sink away into a cloud.

"Of course," said the Baroness, to Roden, in the palm corner, amongst the perfumes and the smells, "I see it all.

Oh, you are quite right not to utter a word against your wife. But the silence of you men is usually as explanatory as your speech. Only a woman can lie with her mouth shut. I said at once to Sandring: there will be a terrible shindy between your daughter and her husband. No shindy? Well, that is still worse. Any shindy is better than a solemn estrangement. Would you mind my giving you a bit of advice?"

"No," replied Egon, for he really fancied any one's aid might be of use.

"That is rather nice of you. *Eh bien*, go at once to Montreux; see this man. You have never been away from her as yet? So much the better. For small estrangements the cure is separation; for big it is the kill. Go. If he says he cannot heal you, it will melt her heart; if he says he can, it will be the same. In any case, go! Meanwhile, I, with the Colonel, will accompany Dolly to Bel Respiro."

"And there she will have her friend to occupy her," said Egon. "It is true; I can just run there and back; if I know his opinion, I can wait till the spring." So, without much leave-taking, in solemn sadness and mutual discouragement, he went.

Konrad had dashed through the Gotthard to Lucerne. His intention was to hasten to his mother at Wiesbaden, and from there to put himself in communication with Count Roden-Rheyna. As soon as it was possible, he must marry.

At Lucerne he got a telegram from Dickie, who had also fled, to the Grand Hôtel, Territet, from the scandals of Baveno. "Come to me at once. I am wretched. I shall kill myself."

At this last sentence he laughed aloud. And he paced up and down his hotel-room a few minutes in silence.

"I never knew a woman with such arms," he said. And he took the train across to Territet.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

" MARK ! "

There was much more in the cry than mere recognition, or than even the heartiest welcome to any individual friend.

Dorothea stood on the landing-stage, amongst the usual rabble of porters and hangers-on. The little steamer from Luino was rounding slowly in the dark-blue Borromean bay. The shadows from the snow-lit mountains lay across the peaceful water.

On the deck stood Mark Lester waving his cap. And in his face rose up before the Frau von Roden the whole of her childhood and girlhood, a mirage of the soul. In a moment it was gone ; they say that drowning men so see the past.

Close by, yet far away, the snow-lit mountains flung their shadows forward, across the troubled lake.

She was asking him, first in her thoughts, then with her eyes, with her lips at last, of all the hundred memories a woman's heart can hold. Women remember ; a man, at the utmost, does not forget.

" And your husband ? " said Mark. " He is well, I hope ? " .

" He is not here," answered Dorothea. She caught the expression he banished from his face. It was one of satisfaction. She hastened on. " He has gone to consult a Swiss doctor about his foot. He hopes to be back in a day or two."

" Will the foot be cured in that time ? " queried Mark, with a sigh.

" It is only a consultation. Perhaps we shall go there in the spring for treatment. Meanwhile, you must hasten to get well."

"Oh, I am well already!" He threw up his head in the old way. He believed the truth of his words.

"You will find my father and—and his wife at Bel Respiro. Mark, what did you think when you crossed the Dutch frontier? Has the world not grown suddenly wide?"

"I had been as far as Heidelberg before," he said proudly.

"True, I forgot. We have a very long drive, you know, Mark. We shall have heaps of time to talk."

"So much the better. The other people at the villa will hardly care for our subjects of conversation."

"Now, Mark, you are not to begin by being 'gauche.'"

"Shouldn't I be that if I were to talk to your step-mother of Em and Doll and the children at the lodge?"

"My father's wife," said Dorothea, who could not bear to hear him use a nearer term, "My father's wife is prepared to make a great deal of you. She has come into contact, she told me, with all sorts and conditions of men, excepting a Protestant minister."

"She is a Roman Catholic!" exclaimed Mark.

"My dear boy, what else did you expect her to be?" Suddenly Dorothea felt quite experienced and worldly-wise next to this youth. And the feeling did her good.

"The wider you find the world," she said, "now you have got so much farther than Heidelberg, the better it will be for us all." And then they talked of Brodryck, and drove in silence, because they had so much to say, and talked again of Brodryck till Orta filled the view.

"That is the house," said Dorothea. "That is Bel Respiro. The white dove, we call it, nestling against the pines."

"Whose bit of poetry is that? Yours, I suppose?"

"No, it is Egon's. I am not poetical. Dear me, I quite forgot to show you the Palazzo 'Arriet!"

"Is that anywhere near?"

"No, it is close to the landing-place at Baveno. No, indeed; I am rather glad it isn't near."

"Why so? I thought you had——"

"Because Giulietta Pini lives there. Mark——" She spoke hurriedly; she bent forward; they were climbing up the avenue to the villa. "You remember that morning in the churchyard, a year ago, on the 13th of December, when you told me I should always stay at Brodryck, always in my little circle of Brodryck—you remember, Mark?"

"I remember."

"You were not much of a prophet, Mark." He smiled.

"And when you told me that a woman should close her heart to wickedness, should never see anything of the world around, would never learn to know it——"

"Dorothea, I do not think——"

"You were not much of a preacher, Mark."

"But it isn't fair to suggest——"

"Is it not? To suggest what? That we get out? For, you see, we are at the door. Father, this is Mr. Lester."

The Colonel had turned the house-corner at the sound of wheels.

"I hear you speak English?" said the Colonel.

"A leetel," said Mark. He was afraid of the Colonel, and anxious to avoid him, but he found him alone in the drawing-room when he descended to dinner half an hour later.

"Women are always behind time," said the Colonel, "and my wife is the most unpunctual of women. She is late in all things, even in growing old." He smiled to himself, and then saddened at thought of having wasted so neat a thing.

"I hope you smoke?" he burst out, desperately.

"Day and night," said Mark Lester.

"Bravo. A cigar is between men what a bit of scandal is between women; it makes them friends at once."

"I beg your pardon?" replied Lester, standing before the famous della Robbia.

"Never mind. Do you admire that?"

"I suppose so. Is it very admirable?"

"Oh, well—people think so. It is a della Robbia, you know. Personally, I prefer modern art, but of course I can see this is beautiful. Admire it when my son-in-law comes back. I must say this of Egon: he does allow you to praise fine things, even when they belong to other people. Have you any special hobby?"

"I read a great deal."

"Oh! Well, I suppose that is a hobby."

"And I walk a great deal."

"That I should have called a virtue. It is the one thing I can't get myself to do, in spite of everybody urging me. I have had a few twinges of the gout of late. You will have to take me long walks in the woods."

Before Lester could express satisfaction at this prospect, the door was thrown wide open and the Baroness sailed in.

Her hair was frizzled all about her forehead, a sunset of Turner; the snows lay low around her neck as down the hills in winter; her robe was a glamorous shimmer, like stars upon the sea.

"Bonjour, Monsieur le Pasteur!" she said. She had told Dorothea, for many days, and many times a day, with much laughter, that she must practise *not* saying "Monsieur l'Abbé." "I am sure to do it sooner or later, my dearest Dorothea. I used to meet so many abbés about the house of my cousin di Casa Profonda——"

"After all, there is not so very much difference," she told Lester, to whom she immediately confided her embarrassment. "You parsons are but priests who can marry, just as the priests are but parsons who can flirt."

"There are other points of difference," replied the young minister stiffly, for he was anxious neither to protrude nor to deny his religion. But at this statement the Colonel guffawed, and then coughed to hide it.

Dorothea came in hastily, flurried. "I am so vexed," she said. "I was looking at the home-letters Mark brought. A thousand pardons! Mark, will you take in Mrs. Sandring?"

"Why, Dolly, you look quite brilliant and bright again!" said the Colonel. "You have been so dull of late. You will get over Egon's absence before we have him back!"

Mrs. Sandring kicked her husband under the table, but on this point they differed, as on many. She considered that the estrangement between Egon and Dorothea should be tacitly admitted, while the Colonel was of opinion that it ought to be ignored. Each, in a different way, strove to remove it, he by much praise of Egon, she, by still more continuous condemnation of Konrad. It could not be said that both failed to touch Dorothea's heart; on the contrary they never stopped banging it.

"I have news for you, dear," said the Baroness now, at the very dinner-table. "Other people bring news, you see, as well as Monsieur le Pasteur." And she smiled archly at Lester. Her husband scowled across at her.

"Marriage has developed every fault that I knew of, or didn't," thought the Colonel. "By Jove, what a mercy she keeps her looks!" Aloud he said: "Dorothea doesn't care for news, unless it's from Brodryck or Montreux."

"But mine is from Montreux!" cried the Baroness, "or rather from Territet, which comes to the same."

"Barbolat——" exclaimed Dorothea, turning pale.

"Oh, it's nothing to do with Egon's knee, I mean ankle!" (This constant forgetfulness was a very sore point with Dorothea.) "Never mind about that, my dear; time heals every strain. No, my letter is from a very old friend of mine, the Comtesse de Fanfarde, who always spends her winters at the Grand Hôtel, Territet."

"And what does she say about Egon?"

"Still harping on Egon? Not a word. She barely knows of his existence. But she tells me a lady is attracting universal comment at Territet, and that lady is the widow of Archibald Foye!"

"Oh, please, let us forget Lady Archibald!" exclaimed Dorothea in some agitation. Mark Lester gazed at her. "For an hour," she added, "I have been talking of decent people only. It has been quite refreshing."

"My dear creature!" protested Mrs. Sandring. Though she was a baroness and had married a commoner whose first wife had been a baroness also, she considered these distinctions between people decent and otherwise as unsatisfactory.

"I mean what I say!" persisted Dorothea, carried forward by the novelty of her attitude. "Let the unfortunate woman rest! I regret that I ever knew her. She is surely not a fit subject for discussion."

"It appears to me," replied the older lady, with noticeable spirit, "that I am the best judge what subjects I deem fit to discuss. However, never mind. Colonel, I do not know what you consider yourself, but I should call you supine."

"You would be right," said the Colonel, coolly measuring drops of ketchup. "The one supreme thing I have enjoyed in this earthly desert, has been fighting, between men, and the one thing I have abhorred has been fighting, between women. I am absolutely, hopelessly supine. But this turbot is good. Dolly, how do you manage to get such good sea-fish so far inland?"

"I have a first-rate place at Zurich," replied his daughter, with ready good-humour. "I am so glad you think me a fair housekeeper, father."

"Well, I must say I never thought you would care about cookery."

"Do you?" put in Mark. He looked anxious; he was more and more troubled about Dorothea.

"As a means to an end," she replied demurely.

"To what end?" The Colonel's voice grew aggressive.

"The masculine heart. A wise woman serves up her love in sauces, Mark."

Lester laughed; he was resolved to behave prettily. He turned to the frowning Baroness, and asked, in his halting English, whether *she* liked sauce?

"Not from my hostess," retorted the lady.

The Colonel looked up. "It is," he said, "as if the soul of the dead Archie were amongst us."

"You, then, revert to the subject!" cried his wife, watching her opportunity. "I have no desire to dwell on undesirable things! Can I help it that they occur in my husband's family? I only thought it my duty to inform Dorothea that Konrad is at Territet with Lady Archibald Foye!"

"Good G——!" exclaimed the Colonel.

Dorothea winced and looked at Mark, but Mark's eyes were upon his plate.

"And it appears that—really, I hardly like to say it—but——"

"Oh, not before the servants!" exclaimed Dorothea in an agony.

"The servants?" repeated the Baroness in amazement and scorn. Involuntarily her big eyes sought the impenetrable butler's with what was almost a wink. The butler belonged to the English owner of Bel Respiro: he spoke French not worse and English better than Mrs. Sandring.

"The idea of mixing *them* up in the conversation; I never heard of such a thing," the lady continued fluently in her native language. "Really, Dorothea, I must say that your ideas of breeding—no, Colonel, I am not forgetting myself, but really, between Brodryck and Casa Profonda—well, least said, soonest mended. But really—when I think of my youth, we never had any unpleasantnesses in our family. There was an odour of peace and propriety about my girlish days. No more than you, Dorothea, was I accustomed to improper people. My father, a gentleman of the old school, with breeches and buckles——"

"Lord, are you as old as that?" exclaimed the tortured Colonel.

"With her!" said Dorothea. For a moment they were again alone: her suffering broke through her reserve.

The Baroness smiled. "Aha!" she said; and, as the butler re-entered, "I will tell you all about it after dinner," she said, and they talked of the weather.

"What, then, do you know? Tell me all." Dorothea closed the drawing-room door upon her step-mother and herself.

"My dear, you are tragic. You speak as if I were possessed of some terrible secret."

"It seems to me that you are."

"By no means. Only a bit of gossip." The Baroness threw herself down in an easy chair.

"It is none the less terrible for not being a secret."

"Oh! Ah! Yes, of course. Egon is your husband."

Dorothea spoke unwillingly, standing in the middle of the room, her back turned. "What has Egon to do with Lady Archibald Foye?"

"How you jump at conclusions! She has nothing to do with Egon, except that his name is Roden—and yours."

"We cannot be responsible for the sins of all our relations," said Dorothea quickly. "No family would. Would yours?" She meant nothing especial, in her nervousness, but the quondam Fleuryse believed in an intentional, and cowardly, thrust.

"Soon perhaps you will have enough of your own," she said sourly. "Meanwhile Konrad is courting the widow Archie. Why not? People will talk, laugh a bit, perhaps: no one will seriously blame them. Your use of the word 'sin' is absurd."

Dorothea turned and looked at her, tried to speak, stopped.

"Yes, you may stare," continued the step-mother, toying with her laces. "We have now been several days together, and we have never had a serious talk. I like you, and you are my husband's daughter. I am nearly twice your age. You must let me say things, if I want to say them. I have never been able to act a part. I am all simplicity and truth."

Dorothea sat down on a stool, by the easy chair. "If you can help me in any way, I shall be only too grateful," she said heartily. "I admit it. I am completely 'dépaycée.'"

"Of course you are, but has it never occurred to you, that the fact of being 'dépaycée' does not immediately give one the right to condemn all one's surroundings?"

Dorothea knitted her eyebrows in thought.

"It is a common delusion," added the Baroness coolly.

"Aunt Mary used to tell me of my faults," said Dorothea. "I miss her very much."

"What you need far more, I should think, my dear, is the pointing out of other people's virtues."

"You think I am censorious?"

"And especially, the being warned against your own. Mon Dieu, I really believe I like you. Now, what do you expect, I would ask, in Heaven's name? Do you expect the people around you to be good? Were they good at Brodryck?"

"No," said Dorothea softly. "Still, they were different——"

"Of course they were different. Every *entourage* shows its vices and virtues. Probably they went to church and abused their neighbours? Are we, then, who do not abuse our neighbours, to be compelled to go to church as well? What shall we do, coming out? Believe me, the pious people have faults which are born of their good qualities. We, we have good qualities which are born of our faults."

"But right is right," cried the trembling Dorothea. "God's will——"

"Is woman's will, say the poets. It is true. No woman I ever knew of willed to do anything wrong."

"Then I am the first," said Dorothea.

"Well, self-abasement is wrong. But you are sincere; you do not will it. Women do enough evil and harm in the world, but they never want to."

Dorothea felt hopeless.

"In their hearts, every now and then, love takes a wrong turning, but he doesn't know of it. He thinks he is going right."

Dorothea began to recognise her father's voice.

"It is men who make all the misery. Look at Konrad. Dorothea, you have come out of your shell, with very few feathers on, and an absolute trust in the kindly intentions of the sportsman, the poulterer, the cook! Call him what you will, it's all the same. He nurses your dear little heart, and he fattens it, and fondles it, but all the time he has only one preoccupation. He is going to eat it in the end."

The Colonel's accents had dropped away from the Baroness's speech.

"Mon Dieu, it is I who am tragic," she cried with a laugh. "And things are bright enough for those who

take them brightly. By the disposition of Providence the fowler, with all his strength, is a fool. Those of us who know how to fly up into the bushes and preen our plumage can whistle at the fowler and, if he be very stupid, can even peck his eyes. Then the other brutes cry out at our cruelty. But *you, you, you* are a dove, you are chicken-hearted, you are a parrot that has lived with a parson, a stork are you, kept to get children, a goose that lays golden eggs!" The Baroness flung her fat hands about, flushed, angry, resolved to be kind, and to hit back.

"It appears that I am an ornithological exhibition," replied Dorothea, feeling less sweet.

"And as for sins—to revert to our starting-point—what on earth do you mean? I am nearly forty. I have never in my life heard any one, except priests, speak of sins? Sins! One would think we all lived in a reformatory. To me, when I hear you talk, it is as if I heard my father say 'Remember the children,' when some one of his friends was 'inconvenient.'"

Dorothea rose. Her dress was of the simplest, costliest white; it fell about her like a (story) queen's. "I thank you, I will do my best," she said with difficulty.

"Trust me; I mean well. A woman must choose between the world and the cloister. She *can* choose. A man need not. In the monastery as on the race-course, wherever he goes, he is foul!"

The men came in. The Colonel was laughing noisily; Mark was laughing too. "Your parson is not half bad," said Sandring to his daughter, as he led her aside. "He enjoys a good story, and, by Jove, he can tell one too."

"Father, why don't you tell me your good stories as you used to do?"

"Because you frown, Dorothea."

Dorothea established herself on a window-seat.

"I only frowned at that one of the dancer's daughter."

"Well, but I can't tell if you're going to frown."

She took hold of a waistcoat button. "Now be honest," she said, laughing up at him. "Can't you?"

"Yes, I can, by Jove," cried the Colonel. "Dolly, it's not true, what some people say, that you're priggish, and pretend to be superior. No, damme, it's not true. You look priggish, perhaps, among pigs. Now, I'll bet that at Brodryck no one thought you superlatively good?"

"No, indeed!" cried his daughter.

"And you aren't, not really. Ask Lester to tell you his funny stories; they'll do. There's an excellent one about a cock crowing in the middle of the sermon just when the parson had said: 'Could I deny my faith?' But I won't spoil it. He's a first-rate mimic. I had no idea he would prove such company. Come, Lester, tell my daughter about the cock; she loves a good story."

"Dorothea?" cried the Baroness.

"Especially when told by a clergyman," added the Colonel mischievously. "I agree with her. I like a parson to be wicked, and his story to be good."

But the Baroness rose. "It is late," she said, "I am very sleepy. Bonsoir, Monsieur l'A—Monsieur le Pasteur." The Colonel held open the door for her. "I shall go back to the smoking-room," he said to Lester. "Join me there when you have had enough of reminiscences. I will mix you an American drink."

The two young people remained alone. Mark Lester stood by the wood fire; Dorothea still hung against the window. For some time neither spoke.

"You are not, then, a total abstainer," said Dorothea.

"I never was."

"Of course not. It seems so natural that you should enjoy a bit of fun and an American drink, and that I should be a total abstainer."

"Tell me exactly what you mean," he said.

"Of course I am not an abstainer," she went on hurriedly. "I mean not a pledge-person, or teetotaler, or whatever they call it! I never touch wine because I don't like it—aunt Mary never took it; and then there was the gardener—never mind—and because I'm not accustomed to it, a glass of champagne goes to my head. And so I say: no, and am odious, odious, in this as in everything." She sat gazing dejectedly on the floor.

"Surely a woman isn't odious because she drinks water?"

She looked up at him. "No, but a woman is always odious, when she is with women who do differently from her."

"To the women, perhaps——"

"And the men."

"Dorothea, I think you must be mistaken."

Her lips quivered. "I speak of what I know—now. A couple of years after you had gone to Leyden, you told me

that you had learnt to know the world and that you loathed it."

"Dorothea, why do you again revert to that unfortunate conversation?"

"Unfortunate? It was the last we had together, we who have had so many,"

"Yes, but I am afraid it made an erroneous impression——"

She got up and came close to him. "I, too, have been out and seen the world," she said. "It is a year since I left home for Nice—on the day after our talk. I have seen the world, and I——" She paused: they stood looking at each other. "I loathe it. I loathe it."

"In another year's time," he said gently, "you will learn to loathe it less. Let me speak. It is a mistake to bring people up as we were brought up, in the inner court, so to say, of the temple, a beautiful error. Nobody could help it, I suppose. We lived in a walled corner; our guardians could not be expected to hoist us up the wall, because there were dunghills to be seen outside. Now we are face to face with facts, and must make the best of them. The world is neither as good as we thought nor as bad as we think——"

"What is 'the world'?" she burst in impetuously.

He answered slowly. "In the Bible sense," he said, "it is, of course, everything that is not the kingdom of Heaven. But you and I mean contact with our fellow-men outside our little circle. Well, Dorothea, what astonishes beginners like you and me most is the goodness of bad people and the badness of good. It upsets all the little rules we were brought up in. And so we get mixed, and say every one's bad. Now it's a mistake; don't take all my time finding it out. Realise at once that you know a lot of good people, and that there's plenty to appreciate in the bad people you know."

"I am a prig," said Dorothea sadly. "Mrs. Sandring is right."

"Every one who conscientiously sets himself to do right is a prig; make sure of that. Conscientiousness is a dictionary word; in life it reads 'priggery.' You can see all through the Bible that our holiest examples were thought prigs in their day. Never mind that. Oh, Dorothea, there are such heaps of things a fellow cannot help!" He kicked at a burning log.

"To me," he said, "the great difficulty is not the discovery that many men were better than I thought; somehow I had been prepared for that. But it is the wickedness of the good; the archbishops, and bishops, and theology professors, the preachers and prayers—Lord in Heaven, when one gets to look at them, what liars they are!"

Dorothea listened, hushed.

"God was merciful to me," said Mark Lester, the terrible words coming up from the depths of his soul, "and he stopped my throat."

"Oh, Mark, do not speak like that!"

"Never mind. Dorothea, somehow you are the one person on earth who stirs me up and makes me say things I never dreamed of saying. No, nor of thinking. You are a dangerous woman. You make me a selfish brute. Let us talk about you, your happiness. Tell me you are happy."

She had stooped to pick up a rose from the carpet. It came to pieces in her hand, a shower of silvery leaves. "We all have our troubles and our joys," she said.

"My God, you are not happy!"

"Since when do you swear, Mark?"

He looked at her strangely. "Do you call that an oath?" he said. She did not answer, nor would he call it a prayer.

"I am quite as happy as I deserve to be. We have had this sort of conversation before. It is a silly sort. Shall we go upstairs. You must be tired."

"Your husband does not make you happy!"

She fired round at him, but his face was set the other way. "Do not touch Egon," she said. "He is——"

"Oh, pray, praise him!"

"Do not trouble me, Mark. He is not perhaps as good as you are, not exactly, or differently, but I love him with all my heart and soul."

"That surely ought to suffice him. I will just look in on your father. I should not like to disappoint him."

The Baroness came out into the upper corridor, as Dorothea was passing to her bedroom door.

"How long you have been, my dear," began the Baroness, in a gauzy white wrapper, voluminous as a cloud. "I suppose you like talking to that young man?"

"Very much indeed," said Dorothea.

"Quite so, but I was sleepy and wanted to get to bed."

But I waited up, for there is a bit of information I felt I ought to give you, before it reached you through Aurélie."

"I am waiting to hear it," said Dorothea.

"Wait no longer. I have a note from Giulietta, to say she is leaving to-morrow for Montreux!"

Dorothea reeled up against the wall: she steadied herself, clinging to a chair-back.

"M—Montreux," she stammered.

"She goes to—Barbolat. My dear Dorothea, whatever is the matter?"

"Nothing is the matter, Mrs. Sandring. Good-night."

CHAPTER II.

"TELL your mistress that I wish to see her immediately!" The Countess Pini struck her hand against the side of the open carriage in which she sat.

"My mistress is asleep," replied Mademoiselle Aurélie Bompard, in curl-papers, by the door.

"Awaken her. Say it is very important."

"That, madame," objected the handmaid demurely, "is as much as my place is worth."

"Rubbish! You need not deny to me, Aurélie, that, in your case, the mildest of mistresses is ruled by the most impertinent of maids."

"Madame la Comtesse forgets her own Lucie and herself," said the maid, her eyes softly downcast.

"I? I beat Lucie, and you know it," cried the Countess. "I am of the old school, I. Had you been in my service——"

"I should have given notice," said Aurélie, flashing her eyes up, and down again. "Madame la Comtesse has a message? How chilly it is!" She was not afraid of Giulietta, any more than of Dorothea; she was not afraid of any one. She believed in herself and in her past.

And she specially hated the Pini woman, for love of the mistress she did not fear.

"My message is that you go to her immediately and say that I must see her at once."

"I cannot do it; the poor thing has had a very bad night"—(the maid had stolen down to the door several times in the dark)—"but now she is asleep. I cannot wake her."

"Dear me, is she ill?" demanded Giulietta with sudden interest. "What is the matter with her? Chagrins?"

Aurélie looked up quickly, a straight aim in the other's eyes.

"Pains," she said.

"Dear me, and what does she do for them?"

"Pills," said Aurélie. And retreated towards the door.

Whereupon Giulietta, lightly snatching a book from the carriage-seat, flung it up with neat aim, crashing through the window of Dorothea's bedroom on the low story above.

"*Ciel*, what a woman!" exclaimed Aurélie *sotto voce*, and added admiringly: "I could have done that myself."

Dorothea's amazed face appeared at the broken window.

"I am coming up to see you," cried Giulietta. "*Parbleu*, one has to knock loud at your door!"

A moment later she was in Dorothea's bedroom. "Did you think, my dear, that it was a Nihilist attempt? Well, I *am* a Nihilist; I believe in nothing, not even myself. You must give me back my 'Annunzio.' Have you ever read 'Annunzio'? Ah, he would not suit you at all. In fact you would not understand a word of him. All his sensations would be to you, as if I read Greek."

"Egon says he is futile. But what brings you——"

"And yet Greek, all agree, is the most beautiful language ever spoken by human lips. 'Annunzio,' to me, is the most beautiful language ever spoken by human souls. Does your husband call him futile? Ah, *le gredin*!"

Dorothea stood vaguely arranging her hair before the glass. "Should you not get back into bed, or put on your clothes?" said Giulietta. "I will tell you frankly, at once, why I am here. Pini has gone to Monte Carlo; this afternoon I start for Montreux."

"So I hear," said Dorothea.

"Well, I have come to ask you to go with me."

"I cannot."

"Rubbish. I am going to Barbolat. I was there in the autumn, and he told me to come back. Our lease of the Villa 'Arriet has come to an end; it was an absurdly expensive place; I believe Pini's money is spent. Well, I am going to Barbolat; he is enormously expensive also, but what will you have? Montreux is cheap."

"I expect Egon back in a day or two. He has been unfortunate. I had understood that this masseur never left home for king or emperor. And now he is away."

"But to whom has he gone? To the Pope. It is the single exception, for the Pope cannot possibly come to him. He is to return to-morrow; your husband will see him."

"After having waited nearly a week."

"Well, come with me; you will be in, as they say, for the verdict."

"I cannot come." Dorothea's voice betrayed some irritation. "I have my guests."

"They can look after each other."

"No, for my father leaves, to join your husband, to-morrow. I cannot leave Mr. Lester alone with Mrs. Sandring."

Giulietta pursed up her pretty lips to a whistle. "Whew ! Persuade him to stay."

"You know that would be impossible."

Giulietta marched up to the bed, in which Dorothea was seated. "Come with me !" she cried. "Come with me ! Come with me to Montreux."

"But why ? What do you mean ? Egon would be annoyed. I am expecting him back in a day or two."

"Never mind. Come along."

"Really, my dear Countess, you must excuse me. I cannot insult my husband by running after him."

Giulietta fell back a pace or two.

"The journey is nothing," she said.

Dorothea had pulled at the bell in her bed.

"The neighbourhood is charming," said Giulietta at the door.

"This way, Madame la Comtesse," spoke the soft-voiced Aurélie on the landing.

"Adieu, then, perhaps for good," said Giulietta. Her voice sounded sad.

"I wonder, would Madame permit me to say something ?" demanded Mademoiselle Aurélie, on returning to her mistress.

"Why, Aurélie, you know I allow you to say whatever you like."

"Because I never say anything that needs such permission. But now I would ask—Madame Pini has driven away in a fury—this journey to Montreux, is Madame quite resolved it were undesirable ? Montreux is a very pretty place."

"Aurélie, you have one fault : it is listening at doors."

"Madame, is it a fault ? The faults of servants, when exercised in their mistress's behalf, are virtues. When I listen at doors, I think only of Madame."

"Think of me, then, and go away."

"Even at night-time," said the injured Aurélie.

With a little inward shudder, Dorothea realised that even a sorrowful night was not her own.

"But Madame does not do me justice," continued the maid in the same injured tone. "Often have I served mistresses badly, and been covered with benefits."

"What, you have served any one badly?"

"Madame, there is a French proverb, that one cannot serve two masters. Still less can a maid serve both master and mistress. I have always done my duty by one of the two."

"Your French proverb is a word of the Lord Jesus, Aurélie; you never read the Bible I gave you, in which aunt Mary wrote those texts."

"The Bible, madame," said Aurélie, who was preparing her mistress's bath, "is a book for the leisured. We poor people, when we snatch a bit of reading, we want something gay."

"But the Bible has a word for all requirements."

Aurélie squeezed out a big sponge. "I have not yet come," she said, "to the funny part."

Dorothea sighed.

"As for the religion of Madame, also I have not yet come to the funny part. It is *triste, triste*. With us, first we feel wicked, then comes the religion. With Madame it is the other way round."

"You must not say that. You will have to order some fresh soap."

"All my mistresses have had religion; never have I had the misfortune to live with an atheist like the Pini. But religion, with them it was a comfort, a permission to be naughty again."

"If you think that what little religion I have is not the sole comfort——"

"Let Madame permit me to interrupt her. The bath is getting cold."

"Very well. You can go."

Aurélie paused by the door. "Often I think I had better go," she said. "My talents have no scope here. My talents are for intrigue. I desired rest from it when I accepted the Colonel's offer. One has too much of a thing, and then one wants it again. Such is man. Here there will never be intrigue. In the 'Arriet kitchen, there I was in my element. It all came back to me, the old life. There was the smell of Paris. Here is dulness, goodness. The German lout of a valet, at least he is gone with his master. But with Madame there will never be intrigue."

"No, indeed," said Dorothea. "I really do not think you ought to stay with me."

"I shall do so all the same."

"But why?"

"Because I love Madame." Mademoiselle Aurélie Bompard bounced out at the door.

That evening she wrote in one of her endless letters to herself: "Thou art more than foolish, my Bompard; thou art growing simple. Thirteen places hast thou had in the best *châteaux* of thy country; often hast thou experienced some fleeting affection for a mistress; never hast thou uttered so fatal a thought: 'Because I love Madame.' Were she not an angel, thou couldst not stay an hour in the house after such a frantic confession. She would make thy life a curse and a burden. We rule our mistresses only and solely by their dread of discomfort through our going away."

CHAPTER III.

THE Grand Hôtel du Lac Léman lay in the frosty winter sun. Its padded double windows spoke of sickness and bad air. About it slept that mist of gentle boredom which seems to shroud the smaller northern health resorts. There was a certain amount of shrubbery around it, marking the absence of flowers. Here and there a dull-robed figure crept along the sloppy road. The weather was cold and unpleasant, chilly with uncertain wind, of the sort that would be called "invigorating" by the doctors and people who run a place. The brand-new gold-lace of the hotel *concierge* was the only bright spot in the landscape.

The inside of the hotel was still more lugubrious, sombre, silent, the long yawn of patients who are waiting and of servants who have little to do. Immediately on entering the place, a big waiting-room received you. "Docteur Barbolat?" The smart *concierge* sank his eyes condescendingly, and, often without a word, went to open the waiting-room door. Docteur Barbolat, of course. For what other reason did any one come to the Hôtel du Léman?

As the door swung open, a fetid odour flowed out to meet you, the smell of the perfumed grease the rubber employed, mixed with the various scents of his fashionable *clientèle*. The large ante-room was full of waiting patients; in the middle, on a table, lay a book in which newcomers wrote down their names. There was no order of any kind, no arrangement whatever. At the farther end a door stood open, with a seemingly endless vista of little rooms beyond.

Egon von Roden stood looking out at a window. The great man had come back last night from his visit to the Vatican. To-day, after nearly a week of suspense, the oracle would speak.

People whispered in corners, with the usual hush of discomfort that pervades a doctor's waiting-room. Surely, if there be on earth an atmosphere that can suggest the

entrance-halls of Rhadamanthus, it is here. And he that judges the soul will at least be wise and righteous, while they that judge the body live by flukes.

It was a distinct relief when a big lady, in yellow and crimson, an *habituée* who knew every one, entered and passed, with loud interest, from group to group. The highest titles flew in the air like gaudy moths. A Babel of languages was around you, but the loud yellow lady spoke Teuton-French. "Ponshour, Brincesse, comment fa fotre bauvre sjampe?" The "sjampe" was better, but the fat, old, orange-hued princess had pain in her wrist. Egon listened with inevitable attention to numerous stories of ailments. Suddenly a shrill bellow broke loose from far away at the back of the long line of rooms; everybody pricked up their ears. The great man had entered. He was fifty yards off, yet every word was audible; he was shrieking in broken German.

"Good morning, your Majesty! I am vexed to have interrupted your treatment! But his Holiness—your Majesty will understand!—a life so important; even to Protestants! I hope that your Majesty——" Then his voice sank. "Ah, that was for the gallery," thought Egon.

From the entrance to the consulting rooms, a little man emerged and was immediately besieged by a number of patients, especially newcomers. Everybody wanted to be helped out of his turn, not that anybody had a turn, but for that very reason. The little old man, wee and crooked, with a face like Punch, trotted desperately to and fro, endeavouring to please everybody, satisfying none. The yellow lady was very loud to him about having to lunch with her Majesty. He promised to secure her being rubbed in time.

"The doctor will see you this morning," he said, amiably, to Egon. "I am glad. I feel sure he will be able to do you good." He stayed with him a moment and pointed out one or two people: Russian princes, a very great singer, an Italian duke. "Every one has to pass through this room and take their turn," he said. "Royalties only go in at the other end." The voice of the rubber was heard shouting conversation in the distance; then the little old assistant was yelled for, and hastily disappeared.

The yellow and crimson lady, middle-aged, attracted by Egon's face and figure, came up to him straightway.

"Barbolat will cure you," she said. "He does wonders. Six weeks ago, a man came here, Fürst Chloswitz; he had not walked for eleven years, and to-day he dances! Tiens, voilà le docteur!"

In the entry to the line of rooms, a man had appeared, dressed in a smock, like a sculptor's, a Titan of a man, enormous, with a great big head and yellow beard. His eyes flashed round the waiting crowd.

"La Duchesse de Varese!" he said, in his native tongue.

A lady in deep mourning rose from a corner, where she had been sitting, silent, with a boy of some fourteen years beside her, and a man standing near, who was evidently a servant. She swept across the wide room, a woman of queenly bearing, the boy staggering after her on the servant's arm, a pitiful sight to see.

A faint evidence of sympathy—not a murmur—followed them. "It is the young Duc de Varese," whispered Punch. "The doctor will cure him."

The latter's voice could be heard in a room not far off.

"I will see. I must see," he was crying nervously. "Undress! Let me help you! Help him. So; quick! So. That is right. Turn! Do not move till I tell you! Do I hurt you? Hist!"

A faint gasp shivered forth from the unknown distance. The servant, one of those correct, black-whiskered servants still only seen in France, was observed to gently push the door. Punch had his instructions and thrust it open.

"Hist! Do not scream! Are you a man? I had a girl here yesterday, the Princess Clodia Romagna—turn—so—I see—I see." A long moment's silence, and then: "There is nothing to be done"—shouted in agitation. "Your Paris doctors have bungled the business! Plaster where there should have been gymnastics! Pooh! The legs—" Again the servant pushed the door; Barbolat himself tore it open. "The sinews are hopelessly contracted! Whatever you do will be useless. I refuse to treat you. Herr von Roden!"

The young boy came forth, his features working to control his feelings: beside him walked his mother, her veil up, her hand on his shoulder.

Egon von Roden paused and, rapidly: "Try some one else," he said, "while there is life, there is hope." It was a stupid saying, he felt: the mother looked straight at him: "Thank you."

He followed the rubber along a line of little cabinets, curtained off from a common corridor, cabinets in which men or women were waiting for a turn or preparing to depart, in different stages of *déshabillé*. At the farther end, in a square room, they halted.

"Sit down in that chair," said Monsieur Barbolat, "it has just been vacated by the Queen of Etruria."

Von Roden sat down: his thoughts, at that moment, were not of the Queen of Etruria, most beautiful of modern queens.

"You are a relation, I presume, of Count Roden-Rheyna?"

"I am his nephew."

"I do not know him, but I know your cousin, the Prince of Stolzenau-Gutelande."

Egon had pulled off his boot; the other was examining the swollen ankle.

"I know everybody," said Barbolat, still in broken German, "everybody that is anybody; or I know about them. Sooner or later all come to me. Everybody in Europe, who is anybody"—meanwhile he was squeezing the foot—"drinks too much champagne and eats numerous ices; sooner or later they come to me."

"Do the ices get into their limbs?" gasped Egon.

"No, but into their insides. Sooner or later they have to come to me, and I rub their royal insides. You must show me the whole leg. I cannot judge. I must see. It is not so bad—be assured—as the Duc de Varese. Poor fellow, poor fellow." He stood watching Egon's movements, and repeated thoughtfully: "I rub their royal insides."

"Ah!" he said; then he grew silent, feeling cannily up the muscles. "Have you a pain here?" he asked thoughtfully, touching a point near the knee.

Von Roden assented.

"And here?" said Barbolat, with a sudden snatch at the heel. "Here! see, is this sore? See, when I press thus, does the heel-tip telegraph to the knee?"

"Yes," said Egon.

A light came into the great man's great eyes. He rose up. "Dress!" he said, and turned to the window and stood looking out. Presently he faced round.

"I can cure you," he said. "These professors are fools. The mischief is in the knee. It will take three weeks."

He was gone, and Egon could hear him shouting a few doors off: "Good-morning, most great and noble lady! How goes it with the great and noble body into which you put too much?"

Egon staggered out into the waiting-room, in a tumult of hope and doubt.

"Well, Monsieur de Roden, what does the great man say?"

Giulietta stood before him, dusty from a long night-journey, in a worn-coloured travelling-dress.

"He says he can cure me." Egon wondered whether he was speaking of himself: he did not wait to express his amazement at Giulietta's appearance here.

"He will do it," she said. "He never takes doubtful cases. Let us sit down in that corner. Oh, I am so glad!"

They sat side by side for a few moments in silence. Then Giulietta said: "I shall never forget that I was the first to hear these glad tidings."

"And I," he answered, "shall never forget that it is to you I owe them."

Barbolat again stood in the doorway.

"Ah, Madame Pini," he cried, "you need not have come again!"

"But, Docteur——"

"It is your own fault: why do you eat so many sweet-meats? You know what I say"—this before the full room—"you are greedy: go home and eat greens!"

"I am not a cow!" said the Countess, bridling.

"Would you were! You would have three stomachs. Do you know what we most resemble, great and august lady, you, who are a countess, I, who am a peasant's son, all these grandeurs?"—a sweep of the hand. "A pig is what we most resemble, in the taste of our flesh, as all missionaries attest, having eaten it, and an ape in our internal structure, of course. Did you all live on nuts and green things, like your ancestors, I should only earn money from broken joints, and not even that, for you would be able to swing yourselves through creation without twisting an ankle or spraining a thumb." He turned and walked out. A murmur of appreciation followed him.

"How droll he is!" said the parchmenty old princess, whose every feature bore out his statement that her ancestors had eaten nuts.

Egon went upstairs and found his man-servant.

"The doctor says he will cure me, Hans."

Hans Sturmer laid down the coat he was brushing. "If he does that," said Hans, "and God Almighty, on the Judgment Day, says he must go to hell, for killing other people, I'll offer to go in his stead, so help me God!" said Hans.

CHAPTER IV.

"GOOD-MORNING, most high and noble lord!" cried Barbolat a few days later, bursting into the little berth like a bomb. He left the door to the next compartment wide open. Egon sidled behind him and closed it.

"Hey?" shouted the doctor, whisking round.

"The lady who is dressing——"

"Boy, do you care?"

"No, but I thought she might," replied Egon.

The genius laughed, and dug his thumb into the swollen foot. "I leave all these doors open," he said, "so as to prevent the possibility of slander——"

"Yes, and you give us these ridiculous titles, because you don't know the proper ones," gasped Egon.

"Do not be too clever! Was I brought up to your *Almanach de Gotha*? It is human suffering I studied, not human *bêtise*. I am the son of a butcher: I learnt the structure of your noble frame upon my father's pigs."

"Is it really true that of all God's creatures the pig most resembles man?"

"Consult your recollections," replied the doctor shortly. "Yes, it is true."

"Well," he added, "was I not right in saying that all of you come to me sooner or later. I said it of Count Roden-Rheyne, and lo, he is here!"

"My uncle?" exclaimed Egon.

"Well, I expect him this afternoon. He comes with a very old friend of mine, the Count von Kauenfels."

"Yes, yes, old Franz Kauenfels. My uncle? Whatever can he be coming for?"

"I shall know when I see him," replied the rubber coolly. "There, you are finished for to-day. Adieu!"

He was gone. Egon inquired of the *Concierge* about the most likely express from Germany, and went down to the station on the chance of welcoming "The Head."

The first person he saw on the platform was Konrad.

"What!" said Konrad, "ordered here too? In favour again?"

"No, I came unordered. Barbolat told me."

"Better go away," scowled Konrad. "My uncle don't want you."

"As to that, I shall please myself," retorted Egon. "I should not think that ~~uncle~~ Karl, at this moment, is particularly satisfied with *you*."

"Leave me alone! Why, you cut me in the streets, you brute!"

"I avoid you. But I have never met you and Lady Archibald without taking off my hat."

"How kind of you! I hope you do not find Montreux too dull."

"It is certainly not amusing. However, I expect to get back to Bel Respiro next week."

"What? cured in half-a-dozen sittings?"

"No, but I shall tell Barbolat I must come here later on with Dorothea."

"Are you better?" questioned Konrad: and such is the human heart, he would have felt disappointed whatever the reply.

"Not yet, but Barbolat is satisfied. Yonder is the train coming in."

Count Roden-Rheyna got out of a compartment with some difficulty: he was immediately followed by a very similar old gentleman. Their appearance was dignified, but their progress was comic, for they each had the gout in a different foot, and so fell apart and joined up again, like a pair of scissors.

"H'm!" said Count Roden, surveying his two nephews, "Which of you two is the greater fool?"

"We have not come here, sir, to be abused, but to take your orders," answered Egon, flushing.

"Quite right. The one excludes the other," said the lord of Rheyna coolly. "Is there a cab?" And the two old gentlemen limped away, with Egon limping after.

"The lame and the halt," whispered Konrad. Egon turned.

"And the blind," said Egon.

"I cannot have you both," declared the Count, as soon as he was established on his sofa. "Konrad, you can go. I should like to know, Egon, what brings you here?"

"My foot," replied Egon.

The old Count's irascible face turned red. "Is that a sort of joke, an impertinence?"

"No, indeed, uncle Karl; I am here for the same reason as you—Barbolat."

"Well—after your behaviour at Lugano I could expect anything, even your daring to insult me by making puns in my presence. I shall never forgive your disobeying me, Egon, but neither need we refer to it again. You will be useful to me while I am here."

"I shall be very pleased, sir."

"Don't talk like Konrad. Keep your own individuality, which is your father's, and let Konrad keep his, which is mine. You should have told me you were going to consult Barbolat: you are aware that, as the Head of the Family, I have a right to know—it is my duty—where you are."

"You had forbidden me to write to you, sir."

"Certainly. Chatter-letters, not business ones. Well, here you are, and here is Konrad. I came to see Konrad. There must be an end of this."

"And Barbolat?"

"Rubbish. Barbolat is the excuse, the explanation. There is nothing serious the matter with my foot. I accompany Kauenfels at his sister's earnest request. Bathildis went down on her knees to entreat me to go with her brother."

"I hope the old ladies are well?"

"What a humbug you are, Egon! Keep that inquiry for Franz. 'Look after him,' says Bathildis. 'He is dreadful, dreadful. He will do something dreadful some day.'"

"What sort of something?"

"What sort of something would they dread? He is sixty-eight: that is a terrible age for bachelors." Count Roden stretched himself on the sofa and smiled complacently.

"At that age they very possibly marry," he said. "A couple of years later the sisters will be safe."

"But Count Franz has never wanted to marry."

"That is why. Well, at present, this business of Konrad's comes first. I suppose you have no influence with him?"

"I am sorry to say not."

"You need not be sorry. No brother ever had any influence with a brother that was worth his salt."

"But who, if not a brother——"

Count Roden drew himself up. "*I can influence,*" he said. "Your father was a philosopher: he talked to me once of his categorical imperative. I soon stopped that. Your categorical imperative, I said, am I!"

He fell to studying his finger nails, of which he was very proud.

"Perchance, in some far year of grace,
Philosophy will rule the race.
Till then, the work is done, you'll find,
By hunger and by love combined.

"Do you know who said that?"

"No," replied Egon.

"Dear me, I should have thought it would have formed part of your education. But Goethe was your father's favourite. I preferred Schiller: he was full of all the fine fire and fizzle that never comes true in real life, but that one likes, on that account, to find in poetry. Marquis Posa and Philip II., for instance, how one enjoys that! Just because you know that, in real life, as soon as there is more than mere talk about liberty, sensible men immediately shout for the police."

He looked up at his nephew. "You want to get away?" he said. "You don't care for this sort of talk?"—he winced as he moved his foot. "An old man must find what amusement he may. What do *you* amuse yourself with? Where's your wife?"

"At Bel Respiro."

"Dear mè! I like that; I should hardly have thought it of you. Alone?"

"Her father is with her. And Mrs. Sandring."

"Ah, the Baroness Blanche! Bianca di Casa Profonda. Your mother-in-law," he laughed cruelly. "Egon, I derive daily amusement from the fact that Bianca di Casa Profonda is become your mother-in-law."

"I am glad to contribute in any way to your diversion, sir."

"Don't be insolent. What I like about you, Egon, is that you are the only sane man who has ever cheeked me. I don't count the Child, who acted, besides, under your moral compulsion. Begad, this Mrs. Sandring! And Lady Archibald Foye! It is the new generation. Fortunately we have nothing of that kind in Germany as yet."

"Yet Lady Archibald is a German."

"But she didn't find a German to marry her: he, he!

Kauenfels was telling me the most astonishing stories, in the train, of the Biermädel's Biermädel days. Lord, her conquests! And now this idiot of a Konrad. I can't see her attractions, myself; can you?"

"No."

"That is to say, I can see her attractions, but they are not of the sort that would attract me. She has physical charms. Not merely good looks, but—well! Would you mind ringing the bell? And pulling down that blind?"

Egon did as he was bid. "You received my letter, uncle Karl?"

"Of course I did, as I wrote and told you that you need not send me any more. Well, I have a bit of news for you: the marriage restriction is cut off, 'as being distinctly opposed to divine law,' say the Powers that be. Konrad can marry to-morrow, if he likes."

"I hope he will marry wisely," said Egon, and bit his lip.

"I shall see to that. In fact I have made my arrangements. It is the reason why I am here. Shall I tell you: why not? He is to marry Hilda von Kauenfels."

"The niece? She is only eighteen."

"Well, did you want him to marry one of the sisters? Hilda is her uncle's heiress: he once told me so."

"She is not beautiful, nor is she as amiable as her aunts."

The old Count struck one fist upon the other. "Why do you always insist upon provoking me? Ring the bell again! She is one of the biggest heiresses in Germany."

"And Konrad agrees?"

"I should think so: are you going to suggest that he should disagree? I forbid you—do you understand?—I forbid you to prejudice Konrad against her."

"Of course, sir, I have not the slightest intention of doing so. Konrad can look after himself."

"I look after him. It is you who have chosen to look after yourself. And your father before you. But I am the Head of the Family, as Konrad understands, and he shall marry Hilda von Kauenfels."

"One of the biggest heiresses in Germany."

"And I hope that he will succeed to the earldom of Rheyne. He says he is almost invariably lucky at play. But my health is very good: it is admirable: it never was better, Egon."

"I am very glad to hear it, sir."

"Do you know, I believe you are, you young ass. But it is only because you grudge Konrad his better chance of succeeding me. If you had thought there was the faintest possibility of my dying within the year, you would never have written that letter from Orta!"

"Indeed, uncle Karl——"

"Nonsense. I was delighted with that letter: it showed me that at least one of my relations believed me to be still far from my end."

"It is no use my repeating——"

"None at all. I beg of you, go and find a waiter and make him bring me something to drink."

Egon did as he was ordered: on the staircase he met Count Kauenfels.

"My dear boy," said that old gentleman, "I am monstrous glad to see you." But Count Kauenfels was known to make this remark to everybody: he would have used it on meeting his worst foe, had he possessed one.

"I hope your health is good, Herr Graf?" said Egon.

"Wonderful!" That was the old man's other favourite: it fell from his lips with a bang.

"Come with me into my room," he added. "Come with me. I have something of the extremest importance to communicate." He looked big with the fate of empires, but then, that was his habitual appearance: in his youth he had been secretary of legation, for a couple of years, in Paraguay. "We diplomatists," he always declared, "we say what we mean but we do not mean what we say." The cryptic sense of this dictum he fortunately never was called upon to explain. His entire attitude of soul was importance, singularly single duplicity, transparent intrigue. And all his ambition was that people should know him to be Count Kauenfels and believe him still moderately young. He sat down in a big easy chair and puffed slightly. He was a fat man, and pasty by nature, but his valet did up his neck with some scarlet concoction that gave it a healthy brickdust look. He wore a large seal-ring on a very large little finger, and there was a general impression about him, somehow, of coronets. When he blew his nose, with a white silk towel, old maids who had never heard him before started and said "Ha!" When he swore at his servants they smiled, behind his fierce goggle-eyes. He had been known once to give a little street-girl a penny: she was pretty. His sisters he invariably spoke of as "The

Countesses, my sisters," to his equals; "The Countesses Kauenfels" to his inferiors: he was usually rude to them. But he allowed them to live in his castles and to manage his household. Except for the shooting he never went home, and then he lorded it over the whole neighbourhood during a couple of weeks. At other times he amused himself in the stalest little round of vices. He had never checked an evil impulse, and he had had plenty to start with. In fact he was a sort of caricature of Count Roden, who always remained a gentleman, a philosopher, and a man of sense. Count Kauenfels was one of the people you do not remember having met; you have met so many like them.

"My dear boy," said Kauenfels, "as I have already remarked, I am monstrous glad to have met you. We are old friends, your family and I. You know who I am! Kauenfels!"—the accent of this word is irreproducible—"and as Kauenfels I venture to ask you: is it really true, as your uncle tells me, that you have consented to drop the marriage-clause in the Roden 'Hausgesetz.'"

A cloud passed over Egon's face, but the old man would have noticed nothing under a thunderbolt.

"Certainly it is true."

"Then, my dear boy, you have probably thrown away the earldom of Rheyna. Tell me, how do you find your uncle looking?"

"Much as usual."

"Ah, that's what relations always say. The Countesses, my sisters, always say I look as usual."

"Well, so you do."

"Wonderful! But you are mistaken. I look much better than I did a couple of years ago. I grow younger"—he furtively stole a glance at his tongue in the glass—Barbolat does wonders for me. But your poor uncle!" He turned up the whites of his injected eyes and sighed.

"There was a matter of importance——" began Egon.

"I am coming to it. You young folks are always in such a hurry. An old diplomatist like myself takes time to say his say. But, in fact, we have come to it already. Schlumpgen of Berlin told me, before we left, that your uncle could not live a year."

"My God!" cried Egon.

"Aha, you are sorry now." The old man took out the white silk towel. "What did I say? You young folks are

always in such a hurry. Wonderful! You should have waited a month before you wrote that letter!"

"But doctors are constantly mistaken! What does he say is wrong with uncle Karl?"

"Heart-disease," said the old Count, with infinite relish.

"But people with that live to be a hundred."

"Not with gouty degeneration of the heart's action, not with arterio-sclerosis of the stomach and kidneys, nor with valvular misconstruction of the extra-peptic conduits."

"Good heavens, has poor uncle got all that?"

"So Schlumpgen says, and Schlumpgen is never wrong with persons of our quality. I made him write it down for me so that I could tell the family. Personally, he told your uncle that change of air 'd be the end of all his ailments. Lord, Lord, how shrewd these doctors are. Change of air. Within a twelvemonth. Change of air."

"I don't believe a word of it," exclaimed Egon desperately. "What says Barbolat?"

"Why, he hasn't seen him yet; but I know what Barbolat will say. He will say that your uncle drinks far too much champagne. Barbolat is a genius. Wonderful!"

"Barbolat will cure him," said Egon. "He is curing me."

"Do you think so? Well, he certainly does me a lot of good. How do you think I am looking? Well, that was what I had to tell you, Egon. I am monstrous glad I met you on the stairs."

CHAPTER V.

NEXT day the two old gentlemen had lunch together. They were in high spirits, for Barbolat had promised to cure them both.

On the strength of this promise Count Kauenfels took a glass of green Chartreuse.

"I wish you would let me manage the business," he said.

"H'm, h'm," responded Count Karl.

"After all, my interest in Konrad is almost as great as yours. He is your nephew and he is going to be mine."

"Still, at present, all authority and influence rest with me. As Head of the Family, I can put down my foot."

Count Kauenfels was quite incapable of smiling at the strangeness of this simile. In fact, he had probably never smiled in his life: he could grin at a woman, and roar in the company of men: of humour he had not the dimmest conception.

"Your strength is your weakness," he said, looking very knowing—putting on his full Paraguay secretary air. "The sense of power makes a man incapable of negotiations. In Konrad's case, you can command, and so of course you immediately get angry. Now what can I do? Only wheedle and be polite."

"H'm," answered Count Karl.

"Compare your own position as regards Hilda. You can only bow and say 'Gnädiges Fräulein.' But I?—I can say: 'Marry Konrad to-morrow or else——!'" He set down his glass with a flourish that spilt what was left of the Chartreuse.

"Surely the latter is the more efficacious."

"With women, undoubtedly. But you put a man's back up. It is better not to bully a man in affairs of the heart. I can order Hilda to marry whomever I choose, but you cannot force Konrad to abandon Lady Archibald."

Count Roden stared, growing red in the face. "I—cannot—compel Konrad?"

"Well, well, you can, you can. But compulsion is always the last means we resort to. Let us first try a little diplomacy. Let an old diplomatist try a little diplomacy. The result is often wonderful." He threw himself back in his chair and thrust out his shirt-front. "Wonderful," he said.

"What will you do?"

"I don't know. I must trust to circumstances, and to inspiration. One always does. You remember Bismarck at Frankfort. And I myself, when my chief was suddenly taken ill at Asuncion, you remember——"

"I remember," interrupted Roden with much vigour.

"Esparteros was a wonderful president," continued the other old gentleman placidly, "the best president they ever had: they kept him six months and then only shot him because they wanted new postage stamps. 'We greatly regret it,' said the Minister of Finance, 'we value his Excellency highly, but the state of the exchequer demands a fresh issue of postage stamps.' Their chief source of revenue, you know, is postage stamps—for collections—but the constitution forbids a new issue as long as they've got the same president's head."

"I know—I know," said Count Roden impatiently.

"So next day Esparteros was shot," said Kauenfels with thoughtful regret. "He was one of the cleverest men I ever met, but I outwitted him. In that apple jelly business."

Count Roden struck a match. "Well, go and talk to Konrad," he said, "and bring him back to me. I admit that I rather mismanaged the thing. Konrad is usually so obedient, that, really, when he told me to-day that he felt attached to Lady Archibald, I—I fear I was rather violent."

Count Kauenfels broke into his roar.

"Pray, what are you laughing at?" demanded Roden, vexed.

"I was thinking of a keeper of mine who came to me one day and told me his wife had smoked his porridge. 'But I showed her I was very much annoyed,' he said. He had kicked her to death."

Count Roden bridled and rose from table. He disapproved of Kauenfels and despised him, but that was Count Roden's attitude towards most men. Nevertheless, he was too sensible to show his dislike to associates and equals,

who form, as he felt, an integral though independent part of one's existence. He was never unpleasant to any one but his servants and his kin.

Old Count Kauenfels proceeded to Territet, walking solemnly immersed in his own importance. If a pretty face passed, he saw it.

He was told at the Grand Hotel that Herr von Roden was asleep. "A bad habit," said Kauenfels, who was a babbler, and talked to every one. "To sleep after meals keeps a woman young, but it ages a man," continued Kauenfels, as he pushed past the red-haired head-waiter and entered the winter-garden.

The head-waiter smiled enigmatically and muttered something about "difficult to combine."

"You remind me of the Queen of Galicia," said Kauenfels, standing still in the middle of the floor. "Her doctors ordered her south for her asthma, and north for her nerves, so she said she would stay where she was."

The head-waiter placed a chair for his Excellency. "And she died?" he suggested with deference.

"Dear me, no; she is alive to this day. It was her sister, who followed the doctors' advice, that died. You a head-waiter, and not to know that! Bring me some coffee. I shall wait here for thirty minutes"—he took out his watch—"bring me some coffee and one of the three politically important journals in Europe."

The head-waiter bent his bald scarlet-fringed brow, expectant of further information.

"Dear me, you a head-waiter and not to know that! Wonderful! Then bring me all three."

Exactly half an hour later he rang a handbell and sent up a message to Konrad.

"An awakened negotiator may be too cross to listen, but a negotiator who has waited longer than half an hour would be too cross to speak," reflected the ex-diplomat, as he buttoned his coat across. A civil answer came down from Konrad, who modelled his courtesy on his uncle's rule.

The old man puffed upstairs. "You do me too much honour, Herr Graf!" cried Konrad, across the banisters. His appearance conveyed an impression of hasty *déshabillé*: he was not as scrupulously oiled as usual. But he led the way into his room with his well-known air of conscious self-mastery.

"I am monstrous glad to see you," said Kauenfels, sinking down into a great red velvet chair.

"How good of you, Herr Graf," murmured Konrad, manifestly waiting for more.

"I often take coffee here after lunch," continued the quondam secretary. "They have excellent coffee. And it occurred to me that you will very soon be bidding us farewell. Eh, Konrad, when does your leave expire?"

"Last night," replied Konrad, smiling.

Count Kauenfels sat back in his enormous seat and stared at Konrad. "Wonderful!" he gasped at last.

"Oh, I'm sick of buckram," spoke the young officer nonchalantly. "So I've written to tell them so. *They* won't mind, Lord bless you. More young men than they know what to do with. They'll let me keep my uniform, which is all the women care about. Put me into the reserves."

"But—your uncle!"

"He will hear to-night. How kind of you to care! To tell the truth—you are so old a friend of the family—he sometimes exaggerates his claim on one's patience."

"But what, in Heaven's name, do you now intend to do?" cried Kauenfels, still round-eyed and red.

"How amiable of you to inquire?" repeated Konrad, with exasperating sweetness of provocation. "Well—the only thing I care about is horses: I shall make money by horses, somehow."

"The *only* thing?" asked the diplomat slyly.

"Well, there is one other thing. On *it* I can spend the money I make by the horses."

Facing Count Kauenfels stood a big hotel wardrobe; its wood cracked so loud, it gave him quite a start. But, really, Konrad's smooth outrageousness was rendering him nervous. He had no idea that he could be nervous. He felt that somebody was hitting him, though he could not have told you where.

"You can now marry when you like: you will have to marry money," he said, vaguely snatching at something to hit back.

"Indeed?" said Konrad.

"Forgive me, my dear boy: our two families are as one. You know who *I* am—Kauenfels!" He threw out his chest. "Do you happen to have a cigar?"

"N—n—no," stammered Konrad, slightly losing his hitherto imperturbable countenance.

Old Kauenfels laughed aloud. "Since when do you object to smoking in your room?"

"Since ages," replied Konrad, with recovered aplomb. "As to my marrying money, I am not so sure it will be absolutely necessary. I have never wanted for money. You see, I am always so lucky, at cards, on the turf, or whenever I have sold a horse. I am bound to win in a toss-up with Egon. Already I look upon myself as the future Count Roden-Rheyna."

"Your uncle's health is excellent," said the visitor, annoyed.

"Is it really? Well, then, I need not be in such a hurry to marry."

Count Kauenfels bit his stupid lips. "Of course, there is no saying—at his age, and with his gout——"

"Oh, he will live to see my marriage. Remember, Egon has always been unlucky. Look at his leg! Of course he has made an advantageous settlement, but any man can marry money, if he don't care how. Now, I should draw the line at—oh, well, in any case, I should draw the line." Konrad finished off awkwardly. He was going to say "hunchbacks," but remembered his rule.

The cupboard again cracked.

"You are looking very well, Herr Graf. But then, you are younger than my uncle."

"Look here, Konrad; you have always been a sensible fellow. I do not know the lady, but I have no doubt she is charming. Still, you cannot deny that this particular episode in your existence, in any man's existence, has lasted a very sufficient time."

The cupboard banged.

"I do not understand you, Herr Graf."

"You do not understand me? Most wonderful! *Lâchez une femme*, my dear Konrad. *Avant qu'elle ne vous lâche!*"

"*Lâche*," echoed the cupboard.

"You are quite right. I understand you," murmured Konrad gently. "Well, then, let me do as you desire: I have no intention, dear Count Kauenfels, of pretending to the honour of marriage with the Comtesse Hilda, your niece."

"She is on the wrong side of the line," said the cupboard. The glass door opened, and Dickie stepped out.

"How do, Franzl?" said Dickie, extending a shapely hand.

"Oh, I say, how unfair!" exclaimed Konrad.

"I—I—I——" stuttered Kauenfels.

"Am monstrous glad to see you," continued Dickie, and walked across the room and sat down by the fire.

A moment of embarrassed silence supervened.

"I do not know the lady," quoted Dickie. "Not remember *Schöne Liesl*?—oh, fie! 'But I have no doubt she is charming'—oh, you shocking old man!"

"She is charming," said the old Count, stoutly. "I am willing to admit she is handsomer than most."

"Most what? Most of your souvenirs? Go away, Franzl, and preach to the Head."

Count Kauenfels rose from his red velvet seat. The cushions paled beside his countenance. "My dear Konrad, perhaps you will excuse my pointing out that I had asked for a private interview? I had wished to give serious attention to matters of serious importance. I understand that just now you thought fit to be humorous, with this lady—so near. But it seems to me there is no harm in her hearing me say that I refuse my consent to the marriage which is being arranged between you and my niece, unless you return to Darmstadt at once." He struck his stout stick on the floor.

"I am sorry you misunderstood me," answered Konrad, showing all his yellow teeth. "The Comtesse Hilda will confer on some other admirer the honour of her hand."

"She is one of the biggest heiresses in Germany, you idiot!" cried the old Count, his crimson turning blue.

"Her back is bent by the load of her money!" squeaked Dickie.

"Hush!"

"Oh, pray do not hush her! But hearken to me. Are you aware, Mister Konrad von Roden, that the Comtesse Hilda von Kauenfels possesses sixty-four quarterings? Sixty-four quarterings! How many princesses in Europe can say that? Her estates are the largest in North-Western Prussia—her—her name is Kauenfels!" He fell back a step and gazed at the immovable young man with the smooth yellow cheeks. "*You lucky!*" he said, with what he felt to be scathing scorn. "*You lucky! Wonderful! Refuse Hilda von Kauenfels! Pooh!*" He stamped his way to the door. He had to pass Dickie, and she stopped him with the most enticing move. "Kiss and be friends,"

she said, her big eyes dancing. He grinned, chuckled her under her dimpling chin, and walked out.

When Count Roden had heard the whole story, he smiled a soft little smile, wonderfully like his nephew Konrad's. "You have hardly been so successful as you hoped," he said.

"I admit it. All diplomacy is based on an assumption of average sense in your antagonist. And Konrad has proved himself a hopeless idiot, an incredible, unspeakable, unimaginable fool. What are you grinning at?"

"I was thinking of your gamekeeper."

"My gamekeeper! What gamekeeper? What the devil has any gamekeeper of mine got to do with Konrad? But you do not imagine we have got beyond the first phase of the struggle?" The old gentleman sat forward, pugnacious, aggressive, with protruding eyes.

"What more can I do?"

"I—I—Kauenfels!"—he tapped his knuckles on the table. "I never was conquered in my life. I have had my own way, all my life, about everything. I shall have my own way to the end."

"But not about the end," said Count Roden.

CHAPTER VI.

"Of course I shall get my own way," said Count Kauenfels. He cast his important goggle gaze around Barbolat's waiting-room, which contained its usual crowd of various nationalities and varied complaints. All these people looked distinguished; you could never have confounded one of them with the class which earned its living by honest work. Prominent on a settee in the middle, the red and white cockatoo lady was giving a deaf English dowager minute information with regard to the birth of the present Queen of Denmark's first baby; in a corner the Chancellor of one of the greatest European empires, nearly blind, nearly deaf, nearly disabled by chalk gout, was laboriously laying out "Metternich" Patience; in another Giulietta sat, picking yellow roses to pieces, while Egon read her out scraps from a letter, Dorothea's account of daily emptiness at Bel Respiro.

"Yes, yes," said Count Kauenfels, "I shall certainly——"

Count Roden interrupted him. "Have you been repeating that to yourself all night?"

The other winked. He was the only man in the world to wink at Count Roden-Rheyna, who would have hated his dear friend on that account alone. "You are annoyed, my dear Karl, because I refuse to fail where you see no chance of succeeding? Leave matters to me."

Count Roden-Rheyna stood gazing at Egon. "Look at that boy," he said thoughtfully, "he is, on the whole, the better boy of the two."

"Is he? They seem to me much of a muchness. Egon is the better looking."

"And yet I should prefer Konrad to succeed me. Do you know why? Because he reproduces my vices."

"I do not understand you, Karl."

"Of course you don't. You have no vices, Franzl, only habits."

"True, and one of these is self-will. I am most remarkably obstinate."

"All sensible men are, for they know they are right."

"True again. You are the philosopher, Karl, but I am the practical diplomatist. Now, remember, if Konrad returns to his regiment to-morrow, you will manage to get him forgiven?"

"Yes, but every hour renders matters more difficult. And you will never——"

"He shall start to-night," replied Franzl, with comic decision. His hand was under his buttoned coat: he assumed the attitude of a prime minister, posing.

As he walked down the hotel steps and out into the street, he threw up his head. He heard a whisper behind him: "That is the Chancellor." He turned: "You are mistaken," he answered two men who looked like schoolmasters. "I am Count—von—Kauenfels." He walked away in the direction of the Casino gardens. "I told her to meet me at three," he said.

Dickie meanwhile sat looking at a card which lay upon her lap, between her pretty, turned-up fingers: "The Reichsgraf Von Kauenfels-Courmayeur requests the honour of an interview with Lady Archibald Foye, at three this afternoon in the gardens of the Kursaal. No answer is required."

"Cool," she said, for the dozenth time. "I shall show it to Konrad. Always avoid complications." She went out on to the balcony of her flaring little sitting-room—there was always a good deal of scarlet about Dickie, widow or not—and called down to Konrad smoking on the terrace.

"She has one external fault, her voice," mused Konrad, as he mounted the stairs, "otherwise she is all attractions, all the vices that are virtues in women of her sort."

"Look here!" said Dickie, flinging open her door.

"Yes. Well? Have you answered?"

"I have."

"Of course." Konrad took a cigarette from a tray on the table.

"Why 'of course?'"

"Women always do. I do not believe there ever was a woman yet could leave a letter unanswered. What did you say?"

"I sent him an open envelope with 'Dickie ain't a-coming.'"

Konrad laughed. "All right."

"But of course I am a-going, all the same."

"What?" Konrad dropped his match.

"Oh, you think you know a lot about women. All men do." She shrugged her shoulders.

"But you will make yourself ridiculous: he will not be there."

"Won't he? That will prove him to know as little about women as you do. And if he is, it will prove him to know more."

"I do not pretend to know about women. They are numerous, and no two are alike."

"Good gracious, I should think not." Dickie cast a hurried side glance to the glass. "What is the difference, Konrad, between a Reichsgraf and a Graf?"

Konrad laughed aloud.

"Well, tell me! Is a Reichsgraf a Graf who is very rich?"

"Yes, that is it," laughed Konrad.

"I thought so," said Dickie complacently. "How rich must you be to be a Reichsgraf? A hundred thousand thalers?"

"Oh, a great deal more than that—a million!"

"I wish I was a Reichsgräfin!" sighed the Lady Archibald. "You must give me some more money, Konrad; mine has all come to an end."

"So has mine, pretty nearly," said Konrad embarrassed. Had the Biermädel possessed more discernment, she would have seen Konrad look uncomfortable for the first time in her life.

"Oh, nonsense: I want heaps of things. Mourning is so expensive."

He went to the window and looked out. "I wish you would not speak of it," he said.

"Of money? True, it is a tiresome subject."

"Of your mourning, I mean. Why don't you get out of it?"

She flared up. "A pretty question from you to me! Who is to blame, if I am put to the expense of wearing mourning?"

He shuddered. "My God, what a thing to say!"

She tried to get a look of his face: it was resolutely

turned to the window. At last she burst into a ringing laugh. "Great silly! Come, it is a quarter past three. I must be getting down to the Kursaal."

"Do you expect him to have waited for you?"

"If he has not waited for me, he has not come," replied Dickie enigmatically, and went to get her hat.

She found Franzl sitting on a bench in the gardens, from whence you commanded a fine view of the lake. But Franzl was not looking at the water or the mountains: he was chatting with a flourishing young Swiss "Nounou," all red arms and parti-coloured ribbons. On the approach of the fair lady in mourning, the nurse gathered up her charge and walked away.

"Nobody ever contradicts me," reflected Franzl. He had asked the young girl to stay, and she had stayed: he had told her to go, and she had gone. Aloud he remarked: "What a lot of crape? I don't like you in mourning."

"It is a protection against slander," replied Dickie adroitly.

"You are not looking yourself, my dear. I don't think this climate suits you."

"I am Lady Archibald Foye," replied the Biermädcl, "and this climate suits me remarkably well. But it is bad for old gentlemen: it gives them the apoplexies."

"Well, then, my dear Lady Archibald, I see it is no use attempting to get round you. I have always had the greatest admiration for your head, inside and out. I am monstrous glad to meet you here."

"Say something more original than that." Lady Archibald played with her *en-tout-cas*, and wrote "Reichsgraf" in the gravel.

"You must let our good Konrad go back to his regiment."

"Is that original? By no means. My conscience has told me nine times in these last forty-eight hours. Yes, I counted the times. It is a hateful thing, having a conscience: it is like having drunk too much beer. I never had one before——"

"Before when?"

"Never you mind. Before quite recently. Pooh, why shouldn't I tell you, Franzl? Before poor Archie was—died."

"Wonderful!" said Franzl, and felt if his cravat hung straight.

"But I had nothing to do with that, mind. It was in no way any fault of mine. Nobody could blame me in any way. No, nor Herr von Roden. It was all poor Archie's own foolish fault. He hit Konrad, you know, without any reason! Imagine that. And when a German officer is hit, what can he do? Konrad was very sorry: he told me once"—her voice dropped—"how sorry he was."

"That was ungallant of him," said old Kauenfels.

She cast him an angry look out of her innocent blue eyes, "I too was sorry," she said, "and I have developed uncomfortable feelings, in my inside, especially of nights, I don't quite know what, or why. Poor Archie, I was very tired of him. We should never have married. That, too, was *his* mistake."

"Humph!" said Franzl.

"Do you think it was mine?" she cried angrily. "Do you really imagine I wanted to tie myself down to him? Poor lad, he had ridiculous ideas on some subjects. They ruined him first: then they killed him. That is what comes of virtue. At college, you know, he was nicknamed 'the Vestal.' When I look back at his life now, it seems to me like one of his own poor flat, exploded puns."

"Quite so, but let us revert to our subject. The air is getting chilly. You must send von Roden back to his regiment."

"Impossible; he has thrown up his commission!"

"Nothing is impossible to Count Roden-Rheyna. That is to say: Konrad must go back to-night. To-night." His manner was very impressive.

"Who are those people out there in the sailing-boat?" answered Dickie.

"I have not the faintest idea, nor do I care."

"My eyes are better than yours, Herr Graf. They are better than most people's. Do you think Giulietta and Egon ought to be out in a boat by themselves?"

"Why not? Two married people!"

"Just so. Well, what were we saying? To-night? That is very sudden. I do not think I could possibly get all my things packed for Darmstadt by to-night."

A cold little sunset wind came creeping over the water. Count Kauenfels turned up the collar of his coat. "How very unbecoming," said Dickie, and he quickly turned it down again. "You are laughing at me," he said energetically.

"No? So much the worse for me. Let us get to business. You used to know what business was."

"Oh, business," said Dickie demurely, and began buttoning her already buttoned gloves.

"I offer you fifteen thousand francs if you leave for—anywhere but Darmstadt to-night."

"Who provides them?" asked Dickie.

"Never mind who provides them. I guarantee their payment, I, Kauenfels!"

"I think Kauenfels is a very ugly name," replied Dickie, "but I like Courmayeur."

The Count had got up from the seat. She, too, rose, and together they walked towards the gates.

"Well?" he insisted impatiently. "Well?"

"Call a cab," answered Dickie. A close one came up; she held the door open. He stood ogling her all over, sure of his success, satisfied, as usual, with himself, and also with her, thinking how well she looked, how clever he had been to alarm her. By George, he had deemed her very handsome at Kissingen—the Biermädel! By George, Lady Archibald!

"I refuse," she said. "I refuse. I refuse." She said it half a dozen times, with such vehemence that the preponderous old personage staggered back.

"Wonderful!" he murmured. "You refuse."

"Of course, you old duffer," said Dickie. Her neatly-gloved hand played with the cab door: a lot of yellow ringlets fluttered about the crape diadem of her bonnet.

"Dear creature, you don't expect me to go back to Count Roden and tell him I have——"

"Failed," said Dickie, and got into the cab.

"Impossible," said Kauenfels, and got in after her.

She put out her head on the other side, telling the driver to proceed slowly in the direction of her hotel.

"You are greedy," began Kauenfels, settling himself in the growing dusk of his corner. "I understand now. You were always greedy. Well, you can have a little more money, only a little. Do you remember, at Kissingen, when you bought six tarts and ate them?"

"I could do that now," said Dickie. "Let us go to Mosergeil's and get them." So they drove to the pastry-cook's and she chose the stickiest messes on the counter.

"Sweets to the sweet," said the old beau, when they were back in their vehicle,

"I have heard that before," answered Dickie, her mouth full of cream. "How much will you give me—fifty thousand?"

Kauenfels threw up his hands in the dark.

"You see, I am as young as ever," continued Lady Archibald. "It is you who have aged, old boy. Have you got a new valet? He doesn't smooth away the creases as Johann did. What, it is Johann? Dear, dear, how sad. You want a woman to look after you."

"I feel better than ever I did," replied Kauenfels energetically. "And I look better. I am twenty years younger than Roden."

Lady Archibald removed the tart from her lips and gave a low whistle.

"All women tell me so," he added with desperation.

"The flatterers! Well, is it to be fifty thousand?"

"Quite out of the question. Who is to pay them?"

"You. You want Konrad to marry your hump-backed niece, but you are mistaken, I am going to marry Konrad."

"Marry!" shrieked the old Count, so loud that the cab-driver jerked up his horse, ere he jogged on.

Lady Archibald's voice changed to deep-set indignation. "What else did you think, pray, Herr Graf?"

"Why, you said just now you didn't care about marriage—Archie——"

"Times have changed. You must be mad; you forget that you are speaking to Lady Archibald Foye!"

He tried to take hold of her hand in the dark, but she drew it away.

"They have put me in a big red book," she continued, her accents gone quite childish again. "I am somebody. Archibald told me. A hundred million English-speaking people, he said to me, would give the right hands off their bodies to be in that book. There is a motto on it. '*Virtus sola nobilitas*.' Archie *often* talked of it. Rank is our only virtue, he told me, it meant." She put a tiny handkerchief to her face, and wiped away a lot of crumbs, and a tear.

"Pooh! every tradesman possessed of a million pounds sterling can get into that book," replied the Reichsgraf.

"Don't talk to me of that book. I am Kauenfels, I!"

"I don't like Kauenfels," replied Dickie, "but I like Courmayeur."

"Like me under any name, as long as you like me," said

the Count; he got hold of her hand now, and she let him retain it. "Dickie, I always thought you charming," he said.

"And how is Bathildis?" answered Dickie.

"The Countesses Kauenfels are well," he spoke stiffly, but he turned up the edge of her glove and stroked her wrist.

"The dear bores! How they must brighten up your dreary old castles! Well, that is settled. You were crazy, Franzl, to think you could offer me money—any sum, big or little—to perform your good pleasure. Let go my hand. I want money badly; that is true. I shall have it when I am Countess Roden-Rheyna."

"Never!" shouted Franzl, retaining the hand.

She smiled, but he could not see that. "Go and tell the uncle," she said. "There is nothing to stop me in the 'Hausgesetz,' 'Herr Konrad von Roden to Lady Archibald Foye.'"

"He shot your first husband!" cried the infuriated Franzl. She struck at him; he caught her hand and covered it with kisses. They fought in the cab with pretty fightings, and when, at last, they desisted, breathless:

"I am monstrous glad," gasped Kauenfels, "to have met you again. You were always a most delightful creature. You are right, I am middle-aged and lonely. My sisters bore me. You shall have a hundred thousand, Dickie, and Konrad shall go back to Darmstadt to-night."

"So be it," said Lady Archibald solemnly. He waxed quite enthusiastic in the moment of his triumph and hers. They were climbing up the narrow Rue de la Gare: it was full of people. Suddenly the cab-driver turned on a little electric lamp that lit up the whole vehicle, inside and out.

Dickie sat up straight with both hands to her veil. "After all, what does it matter?" she said. "Everybody will know of our engagement to-morrow."

Her companion gave a little jump, but otherwise he sat silent.

"You can now go to my lord of Rheyna and explain," continued Dickie. "Was it a wager, did you say? You have won it."

Still the old gentleman did not answer. He was looking at his reflection in the window-glass opposite, and pondering many things. I am old and ill, he was thinking, and very lonely and uncomfortable, and if she absolutely refuses any

other arrangement—well, absolutely refuses! She is even more adorable than at Kissingen, and the daughter-in-law of an English Marquess. And Bathildis——

"Dear Dickie," he said aloud.

"Lady Archibald, please."

The cab stopped before the blaze of the hotel doorway.

"Everything or nothing," said the widow on the step. She looked back through the window.

"I say, Franzl, swear to me you never made a pun in your life? But I know you didn't. We shall be very happy. Good-night."

She went upstairs and found Konrad. "Come into my sitting-room," she said, "I have something to tell you." And there, as they stood by the flicker of two hastily lighted candles, "Konrad, I *must* have gloves."

"How many dozen pairs a week?" he answered moodily.

"And ices, and a toy-terrier like the Princess Pulmarinski's, that cost two thousand francs——"

"A better one would cost more," interrupted Konrad, with fierce-set eyes.

"And lots more things," she concluded gently.

"Well, see that you get them."

She swept him a curtsey. "I shall," she said. "Allow me to present to you the Reichsgräfin von Kauenfels-Courmayeur."

He stared at her. "What a title!" she said, busy arranging a bunch of red roses in the black about her breast. "Cour—mayeur! Nothing can go beyond that. Poor Archie would have delighted in it."

"You are quite serious?" he said.

"Quite serious," she answered, "and, what is more important, so is he."

Konrad walked out of the room and across to the Grand Hôtel du Lac Léman. None of the nephews would ever have ventured into the uncle's presence unannounced; he therefore waited; Count Kauenfels came out, and down the stairs. Count Kauenfels was beaming like a bridegroom, full of Lady Archibald's beauty, amused, extra well satisfied with himself. "Well, my dear boy," he said, "Well, my dear boy! Off! Ah! Going to leave us? Ay!"

"Yes, Herr Graf."

"It couldn't be helped. A man like me has to have his way—or he'd burst!"

"Dickie's way," said Konrad. He left Kauenfels uttering amazement on the landing. Count Roden lay on a lounge, with that air of arrogant approval on his face which his nephews knew well and hated.

"I understand perfectly," said the Count at once, "the same thing has happened to me in my day. You want a little money. Here it is. I have written to your Colonel. You can take the ten o'clock train."

"He would rather marry her than admit that his stupid diplomacy had failed," said Konrad.

"No, no; things are never quite as simple as that. There are half a dozen complications. He is a great deal more broken than I am. And yet he is the younger man."

"Well, I am glad it is over," said Konrad.

"My dear boy, bear up."

Konrad looked full at his uncle. "I am delighted to be rid of her, sir."

"What? Do you mean to tell me you wanted to break with a woman and didn't know how? And you threw up your commission? Konrad, I could have believed such a thing possible in Egon, with his virtuous qualms and rubbish! But you? You have solved my life-long problem, which of you, the humbug or the rogue, is the greater fool?"

"I wanted to break with her," said Konrad, his face gone to patches, "but I was madly in love with her all the same."

Count Roden-Rheyna rang the bell for his tea. "Really, you must excuse me," he said. "You had better talk of these things with Kauenfels."

CHAPTER VII.

THE same days which saw the deliverance of Konrad—for the time being, at any rate—witnessed also the temporary enchainment of Egon. The fates are willingly cruel, and, when God permits them, they do a deal of harm.

Egon von Roden's first week at Montreux constituted one of those lumps in his life which you see to the end, as you look down the journey. One of the knots in the halter Death twists round our necks. Nothing wears a man out like objective boredom or subjective anxiety, a match burning in stillness, without a breath of wind to blow it out.

He had rushed across from Bel Respiro on Giulietta's assurance that the great Barbolat never stirred away from home. Had not this masseur, as all the little inner circle of Europe knows, allowed an Empress to die of mortification, rather than leave his home patients in the lurch? "There are professors enough," he had said bitterly, "in every capital of Europe to ensure that an Empress should die before her time." Yet Barbolat was a royalist, none more so. His ten children were named after ten sovereigns he had healed. When he had healed the eleventh—but that is a story better verbally told.

When Egon, then, disgusted at his flight from Bel Respiro, disgusted at his difference with Dorothea, disgusted at his eagerness, knocked at the big man's door, the last thing he had deemed possible was to find it closed. He had reckoned on returning to the Villa within eight and forty hours. "Gone!" said the supercilious porter, all gold lace and mental superiority. "Gone for the first, and probably the last time in his life. Suddenly called to see his Holiness the Pope."

"The Pope!"

"*He can't* come to me," says Barbolat. "Besides, he and I, we should sympathise. We two are the only equals, the superiors of these tiny, big greatnesses. He holds their

souls, as I hold their bodies, in the hollow of his hand.' And he is gone."

So Egon hung on for a few days. To go back seemed as foolish as not to remain. He bored himself hugely, and yet he gnawed his heart with sharp teeth of yearning and fear. There was little hope in his breast; still, all the long-dead possibilities were suddenly alive again and aflame.

Then came the decisive interview, the few quick words of assurance—the immediate—temporary—conviction, that here was truth, probable certainty, strength. The Titan voice of the great healer seemed to Egon as the voice of a god.

He went out from the presence-chamber, and found himself face to face with Giulietta. During all the wondrous week of increasing faith, of triumphant sight, that followed, he found himself face to face with Giulietta.

"I asked your wife to come with me, but she refused," said the Countess Pini.

"She could not leave her guests," replied Egon firmly.

"Very true. Why don't you sometimes go and call on Lady Archibald? Your brother is often there."

"Lady Archibald has few attractions for me. Do you find I bore you?"

"Have I attractions?"

From the first she set herself to captivate him. Not for any definite reason, but simply because such was her way. Giulietta Pini was one of those exquisitely amiable, by no means intentionally hurtful natures, that can no more live outside admiration than a fish would leap to land. Everyone knows shoals of them. Yet with her there was this distinction to be made, that her conquests were not so much the result of design on her part as the inevitable outcome of a charming woman's persistent eagerness to charm. She was a year or two older than Egon; for a dozen years, therefore, already, she had been an enticing beauty in her Neapolitan home, where all youth is beautiful, and most middle age plain. Not yet thirty, she was painfully afraid of an early sunset. Old Pini was her second husband. She had never known love, nor vice.

"Yes, I asked Dorothea to come, but in vain," she repeated. "I am sorry."

"You think she would have taken me off your hands?"

"Do not be so deprecatory. Or are you really diffident?"

"I don't know about being diffident. That don't seem a decent sort of thing for a man to be. But I certainly never flattered myself I was a lady's man."

"I should think not! Was there ever anything more detestable? We have a few of them still left in Italy. 'Ah bellissima! Graziosissima!'" She stopped herself, looked uncomfortable, reminiscent of Pini.

"No, my husband is not a lady's man," she said aloud.

"I never said he was."

"But I very nearly did. One thing you must not mind, in me; I love to think aloud."

"Count Pini is what you yourselves call a 'galant 'uomo,' a very different thing."

"You like him? Do you know, I am very glad you like him. Let us go and sit over yonder, in that little summer-house, away from this noise and dust."

They were in the Casino gardens; a concert was going on.

"I like him also," she said, "I daresay, if we compared notes, we should find I liked him very much as you do."

He was silent, not knowing what to say.

"But don't let us compare notes," she continued with quick change of voice. "Do you know your wife is very sensible, to remain where she is, and not to come running after you?"

She repeated the words, sitting in the summer-house looking away towards the lake: "Yes, your wife is very sensible, not to come running after you." Still her gaze was fixed upon the lake. "'Absence makes the heart grow fonder.' That is very true, especially when it starts with being fond." She turned, with all her graceful vivacity of movement: "Why don't you go away? I don't believe you really like me at all!"

She had expected him to answer, in her own line of trifling, that, because he liked her, it were dangerous for him to go away, but she was doomed to disappointment. Egon never paid compliments—they had formed no part of his straightforward upbringing—nor could he utter sweet nothings which, to the Italian, would have seemed less than nothing, and not even sweet. He therefore gnawed his big moustache, and said that he intended to remain.

"Her step-mamma will exasperate her, and her, parson brother will bore her," continued Giulietta provokingly. "There is nothing more wearisome than the companion of

a youth one has outgrown. Your wife, when you first met her, she was doubtless very sweet and good. Was she shy?"

"No," said Egon shortly.

"She is still sweet and good. I like her. But she has a 'grand air,' a shrinking little friendly air, as if she would say: 'Let us sit outside our hearts and be kind.'"

"What do you mean?" said Egon.

"A great deal. Let us talk of something else. The weather is very fine."

"Yes, and so mild for the season," said Egon, relieved. "As I came along, I actually saw violets in bloom; I could not help picking some."

"Where are they?" demanded Giulietta, with vehemence, and held out her hand.

"I gave them to a florist to send to my wife. I don't know whether you have noticed that the vegetation——"

She was not listening. "My God, to have been shy!" she said. "Shall I tell you about my youth? No, some other day. I beg your pardon; what were you saying? Something about the vegetation. I do not care a sou about the vegetation. What I like is flowers, and fruits, and trees."

He laughed. "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet," he said. "How untrue that is! Smell an 'Ebenezer Parkins', and try!"

"And mountains," she added. "What are mountains? Conformation, aren't they?" She rose to her feet. "Oh, see—see," she said, "the glory of the sunlight yonder across the snow on the Salentin!" Her eyes sparkled; her cheeks flushed. She sank back on the seat and lay drinking in the whole magnificent panorama before her: the cathedral-like Dent du Midi, vaguely distant, white, lofty and holy, the vast crags of snow in the background, the nearer wall of grey granite, enclosing the wonderful lake.

"How beautiful it is!" he said.

She started, as if some one had touched her in sleep. "Don't laugh at me," she said piteously. "I—I think it is getting cold."

"Not yet," he replied, for he wanted to remain.

"Do you know, sometimes, in a scene like this, when some one I like speaks to me suddenly, I seem to have got far away, and he seems to have joined me where no one else can come to us, and I am frightened. Let us go down to the band."

Then he obeyed immediately, and gathered up all the numerous fragments of her personality that were always scattered around her, and they came away.

In the mornings, endlessly waiting for their turn with Barbolat, they naturally talked and yawned about the big saloon. They were not long allowed to remain inactive. And, unexpectedly, they found their names coupled together in a manner which Egon, at any rate, would have given worlds to avoid.

One dark and rainy morning, Barbolat burst into his waiting-room. Some two dozen unfortunates were lolling on couches and in arm-chairs; in his corner sat the Imperial Chancellor, playing at "Metternich."

"Well, mon Prince, does it succeed?" asked the rubber, with a scornful glance at the long array of cards.

"It never succeeds," replied the Chancellor, in sepulchral tones.

Barbolat cast his eyes round the company. "Where is my Princess, the pianist?" he shouted. "Hey, Punch!" (to the assistant). "Ah, true, she left yesterday to give her charity concert at Vienna. She is cured for the present until she again drinks champagne at her charity suppers. Then she will once more have the gout in her wrist." He yawned, with a roar like a lion's. "It is dull. Is there no one can make a little music? No one who can play or can sing?"

"I could sing a little, if you liked," suggested Egon, and the booby blushed. It has been said that he hated performing in hotel drawing-rooms, but he could not have withheld anything in his possession from the man who was healing his foot.

"Can you sing, mein Herr Apollo? Beware what you begin! I cannot stand bad music. Many are heard here once, few twice."

"Lucky tyrant," said Egon.

"Doctor, you are a true connoisseur; you shall hear him," interposed the Countess Pini, quietly opening the piano.

"It is my single distraction; that and making mud pies," replied Barbolat, who modelled very cleverly in clay. Two minutes later he was back in the reception-room, his shirt-sleeves stripped up as usual, his fingers all shiny with grease. "Yes, that is singing!" he shouted. "You have the tears in your voice; it is that! Ah, beauty! Wait a moment, my Princess, while I compliment him. But you,

Madame Pini ; your voices must go divinely together. Sing a duet. Sing opera-music. That 'Schlummerlied' of his is too sad."

He turned to the Excellency in the corner. "And you, Prince, what say you?"

"I dislike music ; it disturbs me," replied the Chancellor, poisoning a card between chalky finger and thumb.

"Come, come ; your game is going wrong."

"I was just about to win," said the Chancellor, eagerly—his ashen countenance almost came to life. "And look here—this king has turned up in the wrong place. They always do." He smiled at his own *bon mot*. "They always do," he repeated to Egon.

"Fie, you talk like a Socialist," cried Barbolat. "That is the one point which Socialists and chancellors have in common—their utter contempt for kings."

"Que dites-vous, docteur?—méchant !" said a gentle voice beside him, and, without further parley, the Imperial Princess, who had got tired of her half a minute's wait, swept past him out of the room.

For a moment Barbolat almost lost his aplomb. "Foolishness !" he said. "What does it matter? The Pope and I : we shepherd the lot. Come, Chancellor !"

His Excellency rose. "It had very nearly succeeded !" he said to Egon. "Like all politics. By Jove, and all love intrigues." And he shuffled out, chuckling, for nothing spoils the temper like gout.

So it came to pass, in the inevitable sequence of devilries by which men's lives are devastated, that Egon and Giulietta were called to do the one thing they had tacitly resolved to avoid. They sang together daily, before such illustrious audiences that refusal was impossible, and preparation became a necessity. Egon found himself alone with Giulietta in her sitting-room of evenings, practising lengthily, before the piano, the successes of the following morning.

"You do not care for Gounod?" said Barbolat, as he pushed his thumb into Egon's knee-joint. "He may not be first-rate, but I love him. You must sing us the big duets from 'Romeo and Juliet.'"

"Choose something else," answered Egon, wincing with the pain at his knee.

"But no : I choose this. I shall ask the Countess to-morrow."

"Choose something else, doctor. There's such heaps of songs."

"But why?" Barbolat stopped work, and looked up with one of those wonderful glances that could see through bones, and therefore certainly through eyes like Egon's. However, there was no why. Or, if there was, the young man himself had not discovered it. Disgusted, he said to Giulietta that night: "Let us try this again," and, looking away, he placed the music before her.

"Ah!" she said. There was a great deal in the single word, but he understood it all; the long expectation, the stubborn refusal to start the subject, the ultimate satisfaction of success.

And they sang, for the first time here, by themselves, the words they had sung in the drawing-room at Orta. All the surroundings of Bel Respiro seemed to re-live around them; all Egon's thoughts he forcibly turned to Dorothea.

"Adieu!—de cet adieu si douce est la tristesse!"

"A—i!" cried Giulietta, for Egon had sung false. "That is quite a new experience," said the Italian, and closed the piano with a bang.

"My dear Countess, a thousand pardons—let us try again!"

"No thank you; I could not sing another note." She went across to the hearth and began pushing the logs with her red-satin toe. "Does your wife like the opera?" she said.

"I took her once," replied Egon. "The chorus of fishermen sang 'Come, let us save the drowning Count!' during fifteen minutes, and Dorothea laughed so outrageously I had to bring her away."

"She is right after all," said the Countess.

"Right in what?" he asked, curious to gather her meaning.

"I don't know." She turned full on him. "Life is not a bit like an opera. Passion should be lived, not sung."

"My wife loves good music," he continued uncomfortably. "Please don't misunderstand her. We were passing through Munich last August and we went to the Schloss Kapelle on that great feast-day—you know—in the middle of the month——"

She smiled. "You are a heathen," she said angrily.

"No, only a heretic. The music there is glorious, not theatrical like St. Peter's. Dorothea was quite overcome."

"She must be a very uncomfortable sort of person to

accompany to public performances," said Giulietta. She slapped him on the heart, as it were, and he fell back furious with himself for having so foolishly laid it bare.

"I shall go and see how my uncle is," he said, and moved to get his hat.

She stopped him with a gesture. "Your uncle does not want you," she said. "You do not believe me? Let us send up a message to see." She rang for her maid. A moment later Hans came down with the reply. His manner was embarrassed.

"Well?"

"His Excellency says that—that——"

"Speak out!" cried Giulietta.

"He told me to——" answered stolid Hans. "His Excellency was playing backgammon with Count von Kauenfels. 'Tell your master that he needn't disturb my game,' he said."

Giulietta took two steps forward, looking the valet hard in the face. "And what more did he say?"

"Nothing more, Frau Gräfin."

"You lie, false dog!" Egon started.

Hans—Hans Sturmer—grew brick-brown in the face.

"And I won't disturb his," answered Hans.

She broke into a shrill laugh. "Qu'il est drôle!" she said.

Hans, outside, in his native vernacular, used a similar, but stronger, expression of her.

She threw herself back on an enormous divan, one of those things no woman can sit on quite properly. She lounged somewhat, and her arms were very bare, as she played with the pearl pins about her head-dress.

"Have you not yet thought of another excuse?" she said, breaking a most awkward silence. "Pray do not trouble." She waved her hand towards the door.

"I seek no excuse," answered Egon—what else was possible?—and sat down.

She looked up at him with grateful effusion, and certainly, for the first time in her life, whether consciously or not, she made eyes at him—great liquid black eyes they were. "How good of you! The evenings are terribly dull. *Were*, I should say. What shall we do? Tell me—this Giulietta, have you ever read her?—not the absurd opera, I mean—the real thing? Of course you have. I not."

"What? Never read Shakespeare? You of all people I ever met. You, with your——"

"What?"

But before he could find fit expression, "There never was a poorer payer of compliments," she exclaimed, and she went across to a side-table and found a little red morocco book and brought it him. "Read me this," she said. "I got it to try it, but *ahimé*, 'tis dull work making love to oneself."

The book was Hugo's translation. Once more she lay back on her sofa. "Let us read it right through," she said. "Let us try to realise the parts."

"I'm an awful bad hand at reading aloud," he protested.

"What does that matter? I never but once heard any creature read well."

With this he had to be content. Nor did she, when the first act was finished, express any particular admiration or gratitude. Gravely she wished him good-night, and he went upstairs and wrote a long letter to Dorothea.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEXT morning Barbolat called him "Romeo."

Nor, for such was the rubber's invariable manner, did he ever again call him anything else.

The days crept slowly by: there were really not more than half a dozen, but they seemed to lag beneath their weight of life.

The quarter of an hour—morning and afternoon—of treatment was torture, absolute physical agony, such as it requires all a man's strength of body and soul to endure. All the rest of the day the knee was painful. So it should be, said Barbolat.

Uncle Karl demanded a certain amount of attention, and his temper was vile. Under no circumstances would Egon have rebelled against endurable tyranny, but now the verdict of the omniscient Schlumpgen, though he never quite believed in it, made him specially gentle to the suffering "Head." In truth, Uncle Karl was weighed down by a number of miseries, which he bore with magnificent fortitude, and vented on his nephews and his man. "Kauenfels is quite well," said Count Roden. "What does he come here for? He says he has a pain in his great toe." He hated Kauenfels.

Konrad had of course immediately returned to his regiment. The little matter of his resignation had been cheerfully hushed up. The high-born, if hunchbacked, Hilda had been told that, a few months hence, she might order a wedding-gown. In any case, she would always be wealthy, though Dickie had written prettily to Bathildis and promised her an heir! No answer had been received.

During the few long days of waiting for Barbolat's return, the differences with Dorothea, the little incongruities and inequalities, had eaten deep into Egon's heart. It is not good for a husband to dwell on such things—they hardly hurt the nobler wife—and he had had too much

time to distress himself over them. Had he found the rubber at once and heard his opinion, things would have looked very much less glaring; now everything seemed to stand out. She should have come with him, surely. She should have come to him. He had told her not to! It was not worth while. It would not have been, had Barbolat at once received him and sent him back again. How could Dorothea know, waiting on, from day to day, in uncertainty? He did not want her to know, did not want her to come. Yet it made him wretched to think of their frequent loss of sympathy. He was not angry with any one, only wretched. He kicked impatiently at pebbles, with the foot that hurt.

After the doctor had spoken, came the great revulsion of fear and hope. A few days of trial! said Barbolat. He could promise nothing as to the duration of the treatment: he must see what turn things would take. Perhaps he would send the patient away to-morrow, bidding him return for a lengthier stay, in the spring-time: perhaps he might cure him in a couple of weeks. Under such circumstances what else could Egon do than linger on alone?—and the days passed, slow with fulness, as those preceding had hung still in suspense.

Count Kauenfels' sudden engagement threw Egon into frequent attendance on "The Head." The lord of Rheyna awaited the young man's exit from the torture-chamber.

"Come and walk with me, Egon!"

"Very well, sir."

"How absurdly white you look? What is the matter with you? Have you seen a ghost?"

"No, but the treatment is hardly pleasant."

"The treatment? For shame. The treatment is alike for us all. Look at me. True, there is nothing much the matter with me. I have always thought you made a great deal of your little ailment, Egon. Whatever you may have wished, you would never have done for a soldier." Count Roden repeated this opinion to Barbolat, who, for immediate answer, dug his thumb a trifle deeper. Count Roden squeaked.

"That is about a tenth part of what I have to do to your nephew," remarked the rubber.

The Count did not ask whether Egon cried out, but that evening he said to his nephew: "Begad, I wish I could like you as well as I ought to do."

"Like me as much as you can, sir," answered Egon, arranging the chess-pawns.

"God in Heaven! Egon, I should have liked your father better, if I myself had been a better man!"

Egon sat motionless, with downcast eyes. A solemn moment passed between them. For an instant, in the great man's heart, a window fell open wide.

"Oblige me by ringing the bell," said Count Roden-Rheyna. "Why the devil don't they bring my tea?"

Like most men of sense, von Roden detested letter-writing, but, of course, like most men of sense, he did many things he detested. In one of his inevitable snaps to his wife he mentioned the reading of "Romeo and Juliet," and dwelt slightly on the charm of introducing to the study of Shakespeare a creature of such artistic sensibility as Giulietta. Dorothea's chatty response contained a little say which left him breathless. "How strange that the Countess Pini should declare she had never read 'Juliet' before, when she told you at Cavalduna that, as a girl, she had learnt it almost entirely by heart!"

"By Jove, that is true!" he gasped; he went upstairs and told Giulietta.

For he took the volume up, and began where they had last left off—

"Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds!"

Giulietta bent forward, as the passionate verses swept down on her. Her eyes dilated: a sob of sympathy broke across her lips.

He stopped short. In the soft lamplight he stood silent, watching her. And she, all her soul in her beautiful face, gazed at him.

"E troppo bello: mi fa paura!" she breathed. The Italian is ambiguous.

"I say, could you repeat what you told me at Cavalduna?" He was laughing at her: she started awake.

"No, nor what you replied," she said tartly. "Do you take me for a phonograph?"

"Well, you told me that you had read this a dozen times, that you knew it by heart?"

"Is it any the less beautiful for that?" She looked up at him with superb disgust: then, rising, splendidly poised

in the middle of the room, a crimson silk figure, dazzling white and black—

"Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night!
That run-away's eyes may wink; and Romeo
Leap to these arms, untalk'd of, and unseen!"

The words blazed forth in the burning Italian, rushing and spreading like liquid fire.

"Oh, I have bought the mansion of a love
But not possess'd it; and though I am sold,
Not yet enjoy'd!"——

She stopped, panting. The logs on the hearth fizzled: a little flame suddenly burst out of a piece of coal and began to sing. Giulietta broke into laughter. "You know the next words?" she said. "No? 'So tedious is this day!'" She threw herself down among the sofa cushions, and yawned. When she spoke again, she said quite drily: "It was your wife told you, of course," and against his mild protestations: "No, you never found out: you didn't remember. I wanted: I didn't care—what does it matter? Oh, how stupid you are. Go!"

Egon sat down deliberately. "I may be stupid," he said, "but I intend to stay."

She scrutinised his frank gaze for a moment. "You are not as stupid as I thought," she said, and then began to speak very quickly: "I want to tell you about my youth. You misjudge me. I have been twice married: did you know that? My parents were very poor—of the worst kind of poverty, black-kid gloves, greasy, violet at the finger-ends, darned. My girlhood was all uninteresting misery: sordidness, cabbage-smells, other people's clothes. At seventeen I married an honest common-place wine-merchant, to help them. It turned out a failure, he died two years later, quite poor. Then I gave singing lessons to support them—my father had become paralytic: he was noble, he was unhappy; he cried a great deal. And now I have married Pini—why not? He supports them, but I did not marry him for that!"

"My dear Countess——"

"Be silent. I married him for his money. I married him to become one of the richest women in the world." She sat forward, leaning her chin on the palm of her hand.

"There are better reasons, and worse," said Egon, annoyed.

She twisted her eyes towards him. "You think I want all that money for myself?" she said. "When he dies, he must leave me a very great deal: that is our contract. And I shall use it for my life-ideal, my religion, my hope!"

"Your husband said something of the kind at Baveno."

"He?—his religion is not mine. Oh, I am a good Catholic: I hate a free-thinking woman. But the Church is rich enough—what I care about, care about—see, my money shall go that great artists may do the great things they were born to—how, I do not know yet: there are plenty of ways. I will tell you." She drew confidentially nearer. "More millions are annually wasted in the useless attempt, sixty centuries old, to make the world better: is that not true? But to make it more beautiful—eh?"

She herself gave immediate answer. "That stopped at the Reformation. I have nothing against you Protestants, except that you have killed all beauty of form."

He would have interrupted, said something—"Let me speak!" She stamped her foot. "The service of beauty, the religion of beauty, the belief in the gladness of beauty! Have you ever read Schiller's 'Gods of Greece'—Heine's 'Gods of Greece'—you, a German? Of course you have. The old religions had their wiser faith in happiness. God, the new day is so pale!" She sank back amongst the cushions, trembling from head to foot. "God has given us beauty to enjoy," she whispered. "It has taken me long years of wretchedness to understand that. I am going to enjoy, to enjoy."

He sprang to his feet with clenched fists. The pain of his knee shot up into his brain, but he didn't feel it.

"I have been very virtuous," said Giulietta. "Always. My life has been very poor and wretched, very admirable and filial, and all that the stunted padre says it ought to be. And when I die and rot, I may go to Paradise." She looked down at her rounded arm. "Paradise is here!" she cried. She stood before him: her chest heaved. "Good-night," she said, and passed out through the door into the adjoining chamber, and left him alone in her sitting-room.

CHAPTER IX.

NEXT morning Giulietta did not appear: there was no singing. But in the afternoon she met Egon at the door of Barbolat's waiting-room and held out her hand.

"I have a letter from your wife," she said. "How sweet she is! So good! She asks me to take care of you."

"You are ill," he answered.

"I slept badly: I have a head-ache. It is nothing."

"I do not like to think of you in pain."

"And you then? You suffer. I know how much you suffer in silence. I asked Barbolat. And it is my fault." Her voice broke: she hastened down the corridor. Egon went to take his turn with the masseur.

Barbolat, usually so talkative, was silent all through the operation: he squeezed harder than ever, and once or twice Egon gasped.

"*V'là!*" said the rubber, rising, red-hot, with a final jerk. "Wait a moment: I have something to tell you. You have been a good boy. To-day I know for certain. Your leg is cured."

"Cured! Why it hurts like mad!" exclaimed Egon in disgust.

"I know. I am glad of it. See the little tendon here—can you feel it? No, nor could your fools of professors—it was torn: it was dead. It has come to life again—*àïe!*—it hurts. Now it will grow: we will put a bandage. You can go home to-morrow. In three weeks you will walk like me." He cut a caper, the stout giant: his clever face shone with delight.

"Come!" he said, and dragged Egon into the crowded waiting-room.

"Lords and ladies!" he shouted. "Behold the biggest of Barbolat's big successes! Romeo is well!"

A chorus arose of admiration and approval. Every one liked the quiet German, who made no fuss about his

magnificent voice. Only the old Chancellor looked up from his game with a grunt.

"Now, I suppose you are perfectly happy?" he said.

"Mais oui, mon Prince."

"The gods detest that sort of thing," replied the Chancellor.

Egon tore himself away from the buzzing interest around him and hurried upstairs. His one thought was to tell Giulietta, to comfort her, to check her most unmerited self-reproach. Nothing she had said or done until now had so touched him as those tears in her eyes, for his sake.

On the staircase he scribbled a telegram to his wife and flung it down to the supercilious *Concierge*; then he knocked at Giulietta's door, and—perhaps without awaiting an answer—went in.

It was the hour of winter twilight, still early in the afternoon, and already the day was dying. Grey cloud-land lay against the window-panes. Masses of white chrysanthemums blotted the darkness like clusters of stars. The room was over-heated, full of perfumes. By the still glow of the fire, on the white bear-skin a bunch of Niel roses. In her corner, amid the oriental cushions Giulietta, in a tea-gown of dead-gold and lace.

He stood in the doorway for a moment. He saw her dash a handkerchief across her face.

"Well?" she said, laughing.

He came quite close to her. "In-three weeks," he said, "I shall walk like any other man. Barbolat has just told me so. Not me only. Everybody. It is time."

She looked up at him; her lips trembled. "He tells me I can leave to-morrow. The thing is over. I shall walk as well as any man; I owe it to you."

Still she looked up at him; suddenly she burst into tears.

"Oh, don't," he cried. "See, I owe it to you. All this great happiness, I owe it to you."

She buried her face in her hands, sobbing.

"Oh, don't, don't." He bent over her, distressed.

She lifted her face. "To-morrow?"

"Yes."

"But you will not go?" she whispered.

"Yes, I shall go. It is better."

"Why better?"

"I don't know. Do not you also think it is better I should go?"

"Oh no, no, no! A thousand times no."

He faltered; he hesitated; all her beauty was about him, like the opening breast of a rose. Her arms had gone out to him in entreaty and abandonment. She was close to him; she was with him. He was at her feet, he was beside her, around her; they were together; they were one.

Outside, the darkness lay black against the window-panes; inside, the starry chrysanthemums shone in great patches of pallor. The room was very hot, and heavy, and silent. The glow of the hushed fire throbbed wide, like the eye of a watcher that sees.

CHAPTER X.

THE midday sun lay warm upon the Lake of Orta. On the terrace of the villa walked Dorothea, watching the shimmer of the laurels in the radiant winter air.

"He telegraphed that he was leaving yesterday," she reflected. "To-day, then, he ought to be here!" And her heart was glad, with a plaintive gladness, in that it could once more, at thought of his returning, rejoice.

"I am glad I can again be glad," she said. For many thoughts, and many talks, had come to Dorothea, with strange new enlightenment, during Egon's absence. She could hardly realise that not even three weeks had passed since he had stood on this very spot. Barely three weeks ago they had separated almost in anger, in such an entanglement of disappointments as combine to make despair.

Mark Lester had rapidly passed through two stages of feeling; he had come, angry with Egon for being Dorothea's husband, and his anger had deepened to realise that the husband was unworthy of a treasure no mortal could fully deserve. For a day or two he had—well, not shown, but not hidden—his dislike of von Roden, and had met with calm sympathy from the Colonel, but with firm opposition from the Baroness Blanche. "I won't hear a word against my son-in-law," said the latter. "No, Colonel, there are some sorts of characters you could never understand. A man can be brave and yet never win a medal. What I value in Egon is principle. Peace has her victories as well as war."

The Colonel yawned. "How nice!" he said. She blazed out at him. "I have known hundreds of men in my day," she said. "They always did things because they liked them. I have only met one, in all my forty years, who did things because he believed they were right." She sat down and tapped her impatient foot on the floor. "In that he is singularly suited to your own Dorothea," she said, "in spite of all their points of divergence. They have

been so differently brought up, poor fools, and we all are the children of our upbringing. Monsieur l'Abbé, you at least should appreciate the qualities of my son-in-law." She got up and marched out of the room.

The Colonel sighed, thoughtfully sipping his whisky and water. "She realises his courtesy to her," said the Colonel, "No woman ever sees deeper into any man than the reflection of herself in his eyes." But Mark Lester sat meditating, and next morning the second phase began.

He set himself resolutely to admire Egon von Roden, and he did so that Dorothea might feel he admired her husband, for he knew there is no conviction in perfunctory praise. He could not be blind to the fact that she greatly valued his opinion, that she looked to him for sympathy, that she was perishing for a drop of deep-well water upon a parched soul. They had been companions in youth; they had life in common; nothing can ever equal that bond or replace it. Even the most intimate husband and wife are strangers half-way.

Mark, therefore, cunningly set himself to admire Germans generally, and especially such peculiarities of aristocratic German thought and sentiment as he, the radical, might have been rationally expected to despise. Dorothea was amazed to find him upholding the value of the duel.

"Mark—you—the duel—murder? Killing your brother in cold blood!"

"It isn't murder," persisted Mark.

"Do not speak of it!" Dorothea's voice trembled. "To me Konrad is a murderer. And—Egon helped him."

"I do not defend your brother-in-law," cried Mark with alacrity.

"No, but you defend my husband!"

"You must allow I have small reason for doing so; he carried you away from Brodnyck. But to shoot a man in open duel is not murder, and a second in a duel is not a murderer."

"Mark—you! A minister of the Gospel! And the soul that is sent to its account!" Dorothea's voice sank low.

"How many souls are sent to their account by right worshipful judges? How many of these are innocently slain? Listen to me, Dorothea, if justice were to be had on earth between man and man, then the duel were a crime. But now it is often the one safeguard of the home;

it is the single defence of the weak (who can learn fencing) against the strong man who uses his fists."

"Vengeance is mine; I will repay!" cried Dorothea.

"So He does: often more surely by the weapon of the duellist than by the legal jabber of the judge."

"You are wrong! You are wrong!"

Mark laughed. "Even if I were," he said, "what would that prove? Did you expect to marry a foreign noble and then find that he thought on all matters like aunt Mary?"

Dorothea started; he followed up his advantage. "Do you think that God, whose mercy, and whose sorrow, are on all things, sees only the pulpit of Brodryck church?"

"Mark!"

"Dorothea, his 'right,' I am sure, is your 'right,' but you cannot expect your 'wrong' to be his 'wrong.'"

"Say that again! Say it again!"

"I tell you," he repeated almost impatiently, carried on by his eagerness to convince himself, "because you have married a man that is upright and chivalrous hearted, you will find his highest idea of right to be yours; you are favoured among women. But you cannot, except in utter unreasonableness, expect that all you deem wrong should look as wrong to him."

She turned to him; her eyes were woe-begone. "You, too, then, accuse me of self-righteousness?"

Into his thin face, transparent with suffering, came a look she had never seen there before. Her eyes sank.

"I accuse you," he said very gently, "of living nearer to God than either he or I."

And he went away, unconscious of his want of logic, conscious only of the wound in his heart.

When she met him a couple of hours later, they talked of other things, of a hundred trifling interests at Brodryck—the lodge-children, old somebody's rheumatiz. The Colonel yawned terribly.

"I am going away," he said to his wife. "I cannot stay till after Christmas. I am dying for a sight of Monte Carlo."

"You may go; I must stay," replied the Baroness Blanche.

"What?—this sort of thing amuses you? Why, your very back-hair looks bored."

"I know what I now owe to the duties of my position. I am Mrs. Sandring. I shall stay with your daughter."

The Colonel first broke into laughter: then he held out his hand. "Y'aint half a bad sort," said the Colonel.

But the Baroness told him very plainly, that she hated vulgarity, to which she had never been accustomed in the saloons of the Casa Profondas.

Undeniably Sandring required a stock of patience at Bel Respiro, where he missed most things that rendered life enjoyable to him. Not all, for his son-in-law's small stock of wine was excellent, and his cigars came direct from a first-rate house at Havannah. But, as the Colonel said himself, he must have the Boulevard or the Bush. In the perfect little house with its exquisite view, its choice knick-knacks, its air of white blossoms and empty arm-chairs, he groaned for variety—*les variétés*. His only distraction was occasional billiards—down at the *albergo*—with Mark Lester (who might have played better, but the table could not have been worse!), and more frequent strolls in the woods with the same companion, who favoured a brisk pace, while the Colonel preferred to dawdle. "But he isn't what you'd thought he'd have been," said the Colonel with enigmatic praise, "considering he's a sort of parson-chap. For I suppose he is a sort of parson: they must have some kind of ordination in those parts." The Colonel's experience of matters ecclesiastical was limited. "All the same," he remarked to Dorothea, "if I was going to 'bless the timely,' as Egon calls it, I should send for a regular priest."

"Why not send for him now?" suggested Dorothea with generous catholicism.

"Bless you, what should I have to say to him, child? No, your parson has distinct advantages: his play at billiards is poor, but he enjoys an enjoyable cigar."

When Lester, however, began to praise Egon's good qualities, the Colonel experienced a keen pang of disappointment. Not so much on account of the praise. "They all hang together after all," said the Colonel. By "all" he meant "the goodies," and by "goodies" he thought he meant the people who deemed themselves better than others, but in reality he meant those distinct individuals whom he felt to be palpably higher principled than himself.

When Egon's telegram came the Colonel only said: "We can leave on Wednesday by the nine-thirty boat"—and on Wednesday, by the nine-thirty boat, Dorothea had seen them depart. But before they went, in the early morning, the Baroness had come into her step-daughter's room. The

Baroness was not so beautiful of mornings, especially not ere she had been generally trimmed. She looked rather like a soiled flower-basket, before they have put in the flowers.

"My dear Dorothea, I have come to thank you," she said. "I only just want heartily to thank you, and then I shall go away." In fact, she already moved towards the door.

"It is I should thank you for keeping me company."

"Do not say that. I am not thanking you for having us to stay with you. Please, please understand me, if I say very little. I don't want to say much. I should like to kiss you, once, before we go, Dorothea. Oh, not the sort of pecks we women constantly exchange. Do you remember Lugano and your wedding morning? God bless you and him."

Dorothea rose up and warmly embraced Mrs. Sandring.

"You remember the little book you gave me in the train?" whispered that lady in her ear. "I have always kept it with me. It shall be buried with me—ugh!"

"And you read it?" said Dorothea eagerly.

"No, dear child: it would give me the blues. And see, what would your father do, if I had the blues? Married women cannot afford to be *dévotés*. Even you, Dorothea, do not be too good for your husband. Forgive him all things. Adieu!"

"She is right," said Dorothea, left to herself. "Mark is right, I will try to understand everything, to make allowances for his views on many subjects, to sympathise in all things, to be his companion and his friend. And I will forgive, everything, if ever there should be need for such a word."

When her father and Mrs. Sandring had left, she called to Mark, by his window. Usually he responded immediately: she looked, expectant, for the pleasantly familiar face behind the glass. But the panes remained dull: there would be no more talks along the hill-side. For only response a servant brought her a note:

"I have gone away too. No *fâcheux troisième* may disturb this wonderful meeting. He comes back to you, cured. I am much better: I thank you from the bottom of my heart for all your kindness. God bless you, Dorothea!"

She was grieved by Mark's conduct at first, for which she could find not the least explanation. Then she understood it was delicacy on his part, the fear lest she should seek to retain him or not know how to let him slip away.

She walked off rapidly, by herself, feeling doubly alone in the sudden silence of all her surroundings, yearning doubly for Egon's home-coming, not sorry, after all, that Mark should be gone (the *fâcheux troisième*: there was truth in it!), now that so soon the house would be utterly filled.

The twelve o'clock train did not bring him: she lunched by herself. All the afternoon she waited in solitude, alone with her thoughts of him. The dinner-hour came: she sat down at the head of her table: with a strange little sinking she realised that she had never spent a day thus before, never had a meal by herself. And the whole house seemed to thrill with a passionate desire for its master—her lord.

She was sitting in the small drawing-room, after dinner, a book on her lap. She looked up from its pages, and saw him standing in the doorway—in the doorway that led to the larger chamber, under the loop of a *portière*.

"Egon!" She leaped to her feet and came towards him. She saw that he looked pale—no wonder—but also she saw, with amazement, that he stretched out his hand to ward her off.

She faltered. "Haven't you forgiven me," she said. "Are you angry still? Egon, I didn't write it, because I would rather say it. I want to confess."

She paused for a moment. He didn't help her.

"Dear husband, I have not been a wise wife, though I've always been a loving. You have a right to think differently on many subjects from what I do. We will talk matters over. You—you will help me. We will never quarrel any more."

A groan burst from him, painfully audible. She shrank aside, as if a shot had been fired at her breast. "You are ill?" she cried. "Is there anything wrong?"—and ran forward. Again he made the quick movement which flung her back.

"Listen to me first: I have something to say." He came nearer, passing into the shadow. His voice sounded so strange, she would not have recognised it.

"But tell me first: is it true? Your telegram said so little! You still walk lame!"

"In three weeks' time I shall walk like any other man. But that——"

"Oh, Egon, how good God is! We shall thank Him together."

"Yes. Listen to me, Dorothea—listen. I too have got something to confess."

"Don't let us talk any more about it, darling. I know all you would say, but it was my fault. Come, sit down: take off your things. Why, Egon, your coat is quite wet—is it raining? Let me help you."

"Mine is a real confession, not nonsense like yours."

His accents stopped her: she turned pale. "What is it?" she said.

"Dorothea, most men—ay, and women—will say I am a fool now as well as a blackguard. Or perhaps they will say I am doubly a blackguard, a small one, to have done this thing, and a big one to tell you of it."

"Oh, Egon, do not look like that! What is this thing? Have you, too, shot a man in a duel?" The tears rose in her throat.

"Worse than that. A thousand times worse. Can't you guess?"

"No!" Her voice was hoarse with uncertain anxiety. "For the love of mercy, speak!" The thought flashed across her brain that he might have struck down Konrad in a quarrel.

Then he spoke at once. "I have been faithless. It would be useless for me to try and keep it secret. I cannot. That is simply all my explanation: I *cannot*. I cannot go on day by day, living a lie to you."

He stood looking at her, looking away.

"Oh, Dorothea! Dorothea, speak to me. Perhaps you don't quite understand. Oh, for God's sake, don't fall!" He sprang forward to catch at her. But she had sunk back on some cushions behind her.

"Hush! I understand," she said.

"You must let me explain. See, now I have told you, rightly or wrongly, you must hear me."

"Hear you," she repeated, staring straight in front of her. "Oh, no, no, no. I do not want to hear you."

"Hear me! Hear me!"

"Spare me," she whispered. "Surely you have told me enough—surely you would not have me listen to details? Surely every further word between us on the subject were—monstrous. Let us be silent, both."

"Then you forgive me? Oh, Dorothea, you are an angel! you forgive me?"

"You must leave me time," she answered, and her eyes,

as she looked at him, dilated. "I will try to forgive you. I shall ask God to help me. No, I do not forgive you: it is no use. Neither can I lie to you."

"I will do anything," he said miserably, "anything to make atonement. What can I do?"

"Nothing," she said, and began to weep.

He turned away, and flung himself against the wall.

When she spoke again, she repeated "Nothing," and then she dried her eyes. "You were right to speak," she said. "There was no other way. You could not have lived this falsehood towards me. It is over: I was fond of you, Egon, and I thought you were fond of me, with all my faults." She rose. "It is over. You should not have married me, but that was not my fault. I wish I could help you, but I cannot. It is over. There is nothing more to be said."

He turned his white face from the wall. "What do you mean?" he said.

"You must leave me this house to-night. I—I do not think I could go away to-night."

"Dorothea! Wife!"

"Wife?" she said. "No. You do not mean that, Egon. You yourself tell me all that is over. You do not mean to say that, now you have broken our marriage, I could stay with you—as—as——" She stopped.

He did not speak.

"I can go away—away," she murmured, "but you must leave me this house to-night." She looked at him, dumbly, with eyes full of prayer.

"If you wish it, of course," he said desperately. He moved towards the door; then, by a sudden impulse, came close. "Give me one kiss," he said.

But she fell back, crying and weeping. "Don't touch me! Oh, don't touch me. I love you, Egon! I love you! Don't touch me! I love you, Egon; I love you. Don't touch me!"

When she opened her eyes, he was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN she opened her eyes, she was alone.

That was the first thing she realised, and the last. She was alone. She began to pace up and down the long drawing-room, trying dimly to understand what had happened, to gather together the fragments, the little that seemed left of her young life. She looked up at the della Robbia, vaguely, and noticed a stain on the carpet she never had seen there before.

This sort of thing happened occasionally in classical French tragedy: she had read of it there. The characters made magnificent speeches; it was very splendid and sad.

Within her own circle of acquaintance, her knowledge of the world as it lives and breathes, such experiences simply were not. People who cared for fictitious emotions paid for them, in the theatres, at so much a night. She knew few people who went to theatres: theatres were wrong.

"O Lord God, have mercy upon me! O Lord Christ, have mercy upon me!" She said the words over and over again, a dozen times, without much belief in their efficacy, without understanding what they could do to relieve her. She pressed her hot cheeks against the window-pane. The next moment she was out in the chilly night. Cold—that was what she wanted—bitter, burning cold.

She wandered down to the silent water. The whole landscape lay dark, a vagueness of heavy hill outline and dull black expanse. The last twinkle of human habitude had faded from the midnight winter desolation. Up in heaven the lowering clouds left a strangely long-drawn rift, in whose distance dimly flickered one solitary star.

She stood by the water, thinking of nothing: she looked up at the star.

The next thing she knew was that she was walking along the high road. She had reached the corner by the path to Rocca del Monte, where the dilapidated chapel stands. Its black bulk loomed beside her. The faded Madonna was

there, in the niche, unseen, with the bleeding, dead Son upon her knees. She felt them close upon her, the hideous group. And the words of the chapel cornice flamed out into the night:

"O voi che passate per questa via,
Guardate ben che vi non sia
Maggior dolor che quell' immenso dolor di Maria!"

The first time she had read them their curious appeal had sunk into Dorothea's congenial fancy. Now they seemed to be eating their way into her intellect.

"Guardate!—Guardate!" She began to reason to herself, despairingly angry with Egon.

"I am not to blame," she said aloud, on the high road. "The sins of the fathers are visited on the children, and the sins of the husbands on the wives." The fierce thought carried with it unutterable comfort. She lifted her eyes into far heaven. The opening had widened; a hundred lights across it shone dumbly down.

Bible texts rose within her, bubbling and bursting like air-balls on the surface of her soul. "The throne of His Majesty is in the heavens"—"He measureth the waters in the hollow of His hands"—"Praise Him in the firmament of His power——"

"Oh, why dost Thou not speak to us in a language we can understand?" she cried. She had shrieked the words in her anger. A figure, slouching by in the darkness, stopped.

"What's the matter with you?" said the man.

"Nothing. Good-night."

"Have you money? Give it me."

"I have no money."

To her horror, he struck a match, revealing her, for the moment, in her light evening clothes, with jewels about her neck and arms.

"A madwoman," said the tramp, in a matter-of-fact tone. "But that is no business of mine. Give me those ornaments, quick!"

She stripped them off eagerly—a necklace, two bracelets—Egon's presents—delighted to lose them.

"Take—take," she said, thrusting the things into his hands. "I am not mad—only wretched—see, the Madonna——" She stopped, too proud, even at that moment, to speak an untruth.

"An Englishwoman!" said the Italian. "How beautiful these Englishwomen are!"

She turned and ran, flying along the road, to the Osteria, to the cottages. When at last she stopped for breath, she began resolutely climbing homewards to the villa.

"He isn't there," she reflected. "In any case he will have left me the house for to-night. We must not meet. We must never meet again on earth."

The stars twinkled down upon her. "The Almighty shall laugh. He that sitteth in the heavens shall hold them in derision."

Through the dreadful midnight stillness, that now seemed heavy with menace, she hurried on. But a trifle suddenly checked her, a faint whine in the middle of her path. It was low, but continuous, some creature, in the dark, by the roadside, in pain.

She stooped, and her fingers touched the woolly body of a dog. Immediately she was down on the moss-bank beside it; she had drawn the little animal towards her; she had taken it up. The dog paused for an instant in its whine, and a little warm tongue began licking her fingers. Then some bond about her heart seemed to snap, like the bursting of an iceberg; the sudden tears swam heavy in her eyes.

"Poor little dog. Poor little creature. Poor little suffering wretch. Poor little tender-hearted beastie." The words came pouring forth in broken confusion of different languages. In the pauses of his licking, the dog whined again; when she touched his left fore-paw, he screamed. It hung limp; it was broken. She gathered the wretched little cur in her arms and carried him home.

There were lights all about the Villa Bel Respiro; there was commotion and hurrying to and fro. Methodical little shrieks proceeded from the dining-room, where Mademoiselle Aurélie Bompard was enjoying a moderate fit of hysterics, surrounded by maids and supported by orange-water.

The front door yawned wide open, and as Dorothea, with the mongrel in her arms, crossed the threshold, Aurélie, by some marvel of intuition, stood alone in the middle of the entrance-hall.

"Ah, Madame!" she cried—at the top of her so shrill voice—"what a fright have you given us! It is like you

to run out thus into the winter because you hear a little dog howl. It is angelic, but oh, it is wicked! Folle, je vous croyais noyée"—these last words in an angry undertone. "Ah, the nasty little beast! Mary! Giacomo! Where are they? Take the animal. Disembarrass your mistress. See, she has gone right away into the darkness to look for the little dog we heard howl."

"Giacomo!" She turned with uplifted finger. "Surely thou mightest have gone to look for the little dog thou hearest howl."

"I heard no little dog howl," replied the grey-haired Italian servant, sullenly.

"Thine ears are hardened by a long life of selfishness. But Madame is an angel of pity. She would hear a little dog howl, even if it were dead! Come, then, thou poor one——" but Mademoiselle Aurélie stretched out her arms at a secure distance from the suffering quadruped—"Marie will look after thee and nurse thee. Madame is trembling with cold. Is this a time of year to run out, without a mantle, after sitting up reading, far too late, in hot rooms?"

"His leg is broken," said Dorothea. "If Giacomo could get me a couple of splints, I could set it."

"Madame? But the village doctor——"

"Any one can set an animal's leg. I have seen the shepherd at home do it more than once. Do as I say. I am going to my room."

Aurélie lifted up both hands behind her mistress's retreating figure. "Set it!" she said. "Set it! Ah, set what thou canst. And I who had come to thee to be free from emotions!"—"Go to, then!" She turned sharply. "Hast thou not heard, Giacomo? Get splints—what are splints? Get liniment, wadding—what do they set a broken dog's legs with—a dog's broken legs, I mean—get crutches! Haste thee—go—see thy mistress's heart: it is as butter in the dog-days. Learn pity, Giacomo—run out into the cold night and get splints!"

"Her eyes were swollen," said Mary's cool tones behind a pillar, "and all for that brute."

Aurélie skipped round. She was going to be exceedingly eloquent, but Mary's expression stopped her.

"There be brutes and brutes," said Mary. Whereupon Aurélie, who was wise in her immediate generation, walked away without another word.

She found Dorothea calmly nursing the sick animal. It lay silent, with eyes languidly unclosing, in a pose of resigned endurance and almost comic content.

"A nous deux," said Aurélie between her teeth. "Madame is aware that Monsieur is gone to the hotel?"

"Did you know he had come home?" cried Dorothea, and spilt a cup of hot water.

The French maid gave a discreet little smile. "His lout of a German servant is snoring upstairs," she said. "All the household can hear him snore."

Dorothea did not answer: she bent her head, fomenting slowly.

"He said he was tired from his journey, and he went to his bed," continued the handmaid with pitiless precision. "All heard him. Monsieur no one has seen."

Dorothea looked up quickly: "Then how do you know he has gone to the hotel?"

Again Aurélie smiled that terrible little smile. "Where else should he go to? I know my little world. I know its men. Of course he has gone to the hotel."

Dorothea did not reply.

"Monsieur goes to the hotel," persisted Aurélie, "and Madame runs out into the night."

"Be silent," commanded Dorothea.

"Why should I be silent? Madame has no power to silence me, because it is my affection that speaks. Madame has no hold on me. Madame can dismiss me from her service, but, see, it is only my love for Madame which keeps me from dismissing myself. I could get as good a place any day, and a better, for I cannot steal from Madame. Not that I have any desire to steal—but yet—there are emoluments which, among other surroundings—well!—when M. le Colonel engaged me, I said: 'I am growing old; I would range myself; I am weary of emotions.' 'Thou wilt range thyself with my daughter,' said M. le Colonel."

"Leave me! Go!" exclaimed Dorothea.

"Had it been summer, I should have obeyed—but see, it is winter. Many husbands have I known to go to the hotel: many wives to run out into the night. And *décolletées*! But not later than October. Now, I admit that we Frenchwomen are *frileuses*, yet have I not been everywhere? In Russia? When the Princess Kossovsky—well, well, Madame, do not look at me thus angrily. Things

are serious indeed, I said to myself, before—I am not ashamed to own it—I burst into tears.”

“My God, leave me in peace!” cried Dorothea passionately, coming forward.

But the maid stood her ground. “I am going,” she said. “I will go. Only I would pray Madame to remember one thing. To-morrow all the servants will know it to be an *esclandre*: to-night they believe it to be a tiff.” She retreated and threw open the door, behind which stood Giacomo.

“Ah, the splits!” she cried. “What are they called? The stilts! Go, then, Giacomo: give them to thy mistress. Go, imbecile, and listen, if thou hear a dog howling in the night!” Triumphant, she marched upstairs to the attics and paused by a door, from behind which indeed proceeded snoring, sonorous as the songs of the Fatherland. At this door the maid distinctly hesitated, and a feeble flush played across her yellow cheeks.

“Pshaw!” she muttered, “I am forty-five. And did not I nurse, all through his last sickness, Jean, the valet of the old Marquise? True, Jean was as old as the Marquise herself—but, no matter,—the path of duty, Aurélie!” She threw open the door, crept in, stealthily closed it. Soft calls did not waken Hans Sturmer, nor did gingerly pulls at the coverlets. Nor did rough shakings, nor sudden, violent removal of the pillow. A clothes-brush across his honest countenance did. He sat up, rubbing his rubicund cheeks.

“Your master is exceedingly ill,” said Mademoiselle Aurélie Bompard.

Hans Sturmer was out of bed in a flash. In a flash also Mademoiselle Bompard was at the window.

“What has happened? What is amiss?” cried Hans Sturmer.

“In your bed before I speak another word,” replied Bompard, who had run the wrong way in her tremor, and now stood, her gaze fixed on the night.

But Hans Sturmer, for only answer, was hurrying on some clothes. “I must go down to him at once. I must go,” stammered Hans.

“You will find him at the hotel,” Mademoiselle Aurélie spoke, her flat face still flattened against a window-pane.

“At the hotel? Why, in Heaven’s name? He told me to go to bed. He was all right half an hour ago.”

"Two hours ago: it is nearly one o'clock. Let an old stager teach you one thing, Mr. Sturmer, when our masters desire us to go to bed, there is always something on hand." The German's stock of French was but limited: it may be doubted if he understood.

"I am going down," he replied.

Mademoiselle Aurélie released her damaged features. "You will not perhaps find him quite as ill as you expected," she said. "But that does not matter. You must convince him he is very bad indeed."

"How? What? I understand not," said puzzled Hans.

The Frenchwoman stamped her foot. "Any idiot can make a man believe himself in danger!" she cried. "A *man*, mind you. Thou goest to him, stupid, and thou sayest: 'I cannot rest. Why has Monsieur gone away to the hotel? Monsieur is ill and will not admit it. Monsieur looks ill, very ill, has looked so for days'—remember thou say he has looked so for days—'I am anxious about Monsieur, very anxious.' If he swear at thee—not before—thou must say that he looks like a man who is dying. If he force thee, 'For three days Monsieur has had the death-look,' thou must hesitatingly say."

"Are you mad? What is going to happen?" exclaimed poor Hans.

"Imbecile, dost thou love thy master?" She pushed him towards the door. "Absurdly thou lovest him, as I, with more measure, love my mistress, God only knows why. Go, do as I tell thee. If thou canst get him to believe thee, the battle is won. Men are only amenable to funk, as women to pity. Go, keep him in his room till I come with my mistress. I refuse to explain more to thee: thou art too stupid. Were we women to wait for men to understand us, the world would stand still."

Thereupon she returned to Dorothea's chamber. She found little changed there. The dog was lying bandaged, at rest, like a child that has cried:

"Hans Sturmer has been here," said Aurélie, standing in the doorway.

Her mistress looked unspoken inquiry.

"I mean, he had gone to the hotel, but he has come up again," continued the unblushing maid. "It appears that Monsieur is indisposed."

"Indeed!" said Dorothea, tapping the leg of the table.

"It appears he is seriously ill."

"So suddenly?"

"Suddenly? Ah no, Madame. Monsieur has looked ill for months. He looked ill before he went. It appears he has spat blood."

Dorothea sprang to her feet.

"He is very—very nervous. These strong-looking people often are. Monsieur cannot endure emotions."

"I never noticed it."

"Ah, Madame! But Madame's health is so excellent. It is difficult for the very healthy to understand invalids. When Madame de Brissay—but I could relate to Madame a dozen stories, from my own rich experience, of the certain misery in households where the wife is very healthy and the husband rather weak. Many a time have I seen in this house"—Mademoiselle Aurélie's voice grew dithyrambic: her look and hands went up to the ceiling—"many a time have I seen the tears gather in Monsieur's beautiful blue eyes, when Madame has misunderstood him—ah, Madame, be not angry—perchance the poor gentleman is bleeding to death."

"Send me Sturmer at once."

"Madame, he has flown to the side of his master."

"Woman, swear to me that this story is true!" Dorothea had advanced into the room: the dog lifted up his mild head and looked after her.

"I swear by all the saints in the calendar," promptly replied Aurélie.

"I do not believe it. He is sleeping peacefully," said Dorothea, yet with trembling hands she aided the maid to hurry her into a travelling dress, "Give me my cloak," she said. "Any hat will do. Quick: let us go."

"He went to the hotel, so as not to alarm Madame!" cried the maid. "'Do not tell your mistress: I shall be well in the morning,' he said. Who knows how much he suffered before? His foot was often exceedingly painful."

"That is true," said Dorothea.

"'I promised—I promised not to tell,' said poor Hans. Madame, we must endeavour to shield him. Monsieur will pretend to you that nothing is wrong."

"How can he if he has spat blood?" exclaimed Dorothea.

"Ah, Madame, these young Prussians have such wonderful recuperative power!"

Dorothea stood still. Former stories of Mademoiselle

Bompard's prowess—hair-brush babblings—came back to her mind. "Swear to me by your soul's salvation," she said.

"Ah, Madame, that is not fair! Madame has too good a memory!" squeaked the maid in a flutter. "Go, then, Madame—go: we may be too late. We must meet him at once: we must speak to him to-night. When people spit blood, they frequently die."

"Infamous woman!" cried Dorothea, recoiling, her big eyes open wide. "To you the horrors of life are a comedy: you look on and laugh and applaud! What do you understand of the abysses of human sorrow and sin? Let me pass. I would not speak to you like this; I would not speak to you at all, if I had a human soul near me, a living creature of any kind, something to hold by, some one to turn to, now God has let me go. I am alone. Do not touch me. Do not speak to me. Respect, if you can anything on earth, my aloneness. I am alone."

Aurélie Bompard fell on her knees and burst into tears. "Ah, Madame, listen to me! I am an old woman: I could be Madame's mother. I have seen many things. Madame is a saint: there is no harm in that; but Madame is a married saint, and that evil is irretrievable! Saints should not marry, for there are no men-saints! I have seen hundreds of men, in their hearts—not their outsides, as Madame has. Believe me, there are no men-saints, whatever the Church may say! The holy Madonna was a woman: a masculine Madonna the world has never seen. Men are like this, Madame—they are good often, and generous, and gentle, like Monsieur, but always they are gross! Nay, listen to me! Go not, Madame! Listen! This night all things may yet come right. The comedy, Madame says—the comedy! Ah, Madame, there is one thing worse, the tragedy, the tragedy, the dead bodies, the dead lives, the slain!"

Dorothea paused. She drew herself up. "I can bear the tragedy," she said slowly, aloud. "The comedy I could not bear." She went back to the sofa, and took up the mongrel cur in her arms, and, imperiously motioning back the frightened Aurélie, she walked down the broad staircase and out of the Villa Bel Respiro.

"She has gone to him: she loves him," said Aurélie to herself, as she began mechanically to fold up and tidy things. But there was no conviction in her voice. She sat up all the remainder of that distressful night, until daybreak,

writing to herself a long letter on the disadvantage, for a woman, of being too good. "Thou thyself, my sweet Aurélie," she wrote, "dost experience it. On six several occasions, in four different ways, thou couldst have ensured thyself a fortune"—and she proceeded for the fiftieth time to enumerate the details in one of those refreshing epistles which she afterwards tore up. "I could not sleep," she would say, "without my letter. At first, as a girl, I wrote them to all my acquaintances, but my blessed mother—another saint! and an excellent servant—showed me the evil of this. Since then I have harmed no one, but yet a domestic has her feelings. I am emotional: I must find a vent. Sleep well, my good Aurélie. Were all as conscientious and painstaking as thou, the world were a Paradise. But now it is more like the Eden Theatre. Is that funny? I know not. I am sleepy. Good-night."

That was Monday. On the evening of the Wednesday following the two aunts and uncle Tony sat, at Brodryck, after tea, over their customary rubber of whist. It was the second rubber: they never played more than two. Uncle Tony was rather peevish, not because aunt Emma played badly—she always did that, like aunt Mary—but because he had sold ten of Dorothea's pigs that morning for a farthing a pound less than a neighbouring farmer had made. Aunt Emma and uncle Tony were inevitably partners: aunt Mary played dummy. Aunt Mary had an unalterable conviction that whist was not quite right, because cards, of course, are wrong, but she played for uncle Tony's sake (to keep him away from the village club!) and, as she refused to risk a halfpenny and took no interest in the game whatever and occasionally revoked, she thought the evil, in her case, could be condoned. "It is when these things become a passion that the wrong comes in," said aunt Mary, "and I cannot imagine myself, my dear, a slave to whist. Still, one must be careful. The heart of man is deceitful—ay, and of woman! And desperately wicked," said aunt Mary.

Aunt Mary had just played her ace and said: "Oh, I didn't know hearts were trumps," when the door was thrown open and Dorothea walked into the room.

"Take back your ace, then!" uncle Tony was saying testily. Aunt Mary jumped up, scattering the cards.

"The lamp! Mary, I do wish you would remember the

lamp!" screamed Emma in shrill agitation. Dorothea had put down on the well-known flowered sofa by the fire, very gently, the brown dog with the bandaged paw. Em and Doll, issuing forth from unknown depths beneath skirts and the card-table, came leisurely forward, barked, sniffed. The brown dog sat up painfully, expectant. The setters wagged their tails.

"Dorothea, speak—what has happened! What is wrong?" gasped aunt Mary.

"Nothing. I have come back to you, aunt Mary!"

"Egon."

"Egon is gone. Gone away out of my life. Egon will never trouble us any more, auntie May"—she had sunk down on the edge of the sofa; her hand played with the brown dog's ear.

"——" said uncle Tony.

"Oh, hush, Tony, hush!"

"Antony, I agree with you," said Emma.

Aunt Mary was down on her knees by her child: her arms were about Dorothea. "Oh, my dearest, my dearest, your mother!" she said. "It killed your mother: you will not let it kill you, my dearest, my own one? You will be brave, darling, promise us—you will not let it kill you!"

"No, I don't think it will kill me," answered Dorothea wearily. "Wretchedness doesn't ever kill people, does it? What do you mean about my mother, auntie May?"

But Emma's voice rose, vehement, to Tony. "You men are all alike!" she cried, shaking her impotent forefinger. "Thank Heaven I was never married to one of you. I wish I had the hanging of you all."

"Well, for once, I agree with you, Emma," replied Tony mildly; he blew his nose. "That's a very poor dog, Dorothea," said Tony.

"Agree with me! I should think so!" cried Emma. "Brutes you are, all of you—do you hear me?—brutes, beasts, pigs, monkeys, apes. If God Almighty offered to change me into a man, I should decline the honour. If change there must be, I should say, let it be a change for the better. Rather change me, I should say, into a tailless ape." Aunt Emma sat down with a snort of contentment, and a slap of her blue satin skirt.

Outside, the December wind howled, disconsolate, like a living beast, in the cold and the rain.

Aunt Mary held Dorothea to her bosom. Twice or

thrice she had vainly endeavoured to speak. She was crying softly. Dorothea stroked her grey head. "Don't cry, auntie May; there's no good in crying. If crying were any use, well, then—I cried so much in the train, auntie. It worried the dog, and I tried hard to stop. A year ago, only a year ago, I don't think I hardly ever had cried. I used to think crying was silly. But it's useless. I know it is useless, now."

"God——" faltered aunt Mary.

Dorothea stopped her. "God is dead," said Dorothea.

CHAPTER XII.

EGON VON RODEN lay on his bed in the little hotel room at Orta. It was a garish Italian bedroom, all crude pinks and yellows, full of the cheery discomforts of a small village inn.

An hour ago he had quitted Dorothea. Since then he had smoked half a dozen cigars. He had also ordered up strong drinks. These he had not swallowed. His cigars were good.

"Of course I am a brute," he had said to himself, a good many times. "Of course I am a brute." He was quite willing to take things tragically, eager to blame himself overmuch. On the other hand, he was also suffering from a reaction; he had braced himself up to play the great part just enacted in the Villa Bel Respiro. All the best impulses of his nature had carried him irresistibly forward against the rocks. But the final crash, with its merciless bruising, had awakened in him an instinct of self-preservation. A mournfully reproachful, a piteously forgiving Dorothea would have left him feeling very bad for ever and ever. At this moment he was angry with himself for suggestions that kept cropping up unbidden of possible palliation, not to say excuse.

"She never loved you," a voice was saying, "with the sort of love with which a man loves to be loved. You have learnt——"

"I am a brute!" he cried vehemently. "She is an angel. Of course I am a brute."

"An angel," said the voice, "that stood with a flaming sword at the gate of the Paradise of the Fallen. The—*Paradise—of—the—Fallen.*"

Hans Sturmer burst into the room. He stopped short, when he saw his master lying on the bed, dressed, and smoking, and stood to attention.

"Beg pardon, sir, I thought you were dying," stammered Hans.

The cheap answer that he wished he was faded away in a grin from Egon's healthy soul. "Dying? Why, stupid?" said Egon.

"Mademoiselle Aurélie told me so, the false French cat!"

"Mademoiselle Aurélie does me too much honour," exclaimed Egon in a sudden burst of bitterness. He lay staring moodily at a purple cherub painted on the wall. Dear me, did the French maid deem the situation required a dramatic suicide? He felt as if quick little Aurélie Bompard had hit him in the face.

"She loves her mistress, in her own way," he reflected, "better than I. She has sent Hans to lock up my pistols, or to administer a pot of hot milk." "No, you needn't order any milk," he said aloud.

"Beg pardon, sir?"

"I said you needn't order any milk."

"I wasn't going to, sir, but, if you feel bad, you might take some brandy and water."

"Hans, there used to be a time when I thought you the living embodiment of genius. I thought you knew everything and could do everything. You were the cleverest creature that ever lived."

Hans Sturmer's face lengthened. He could stand anything from his lord and master but chaff.

"I am not laughing at you," continued Egon sadly. "Well, Hans, it's small comfort to know you're not as clever as I believed you to be, when we were boys together. And even if you were, you couldn't minister to a mind diseased."

"I thought it was your stomach," said Hans, relieved and scornful.

Egon tossed round on the bed. "Have a cigar," he said. "Light up!"

"Saving your presence, no," replied Hans, putting the weed in his pocket.

"Look here, I *must* talk to some one. Sit down."

"Saving your presence, no," said Hans.

"Then, for Heaven's sake, don't stand so straight."

Hans Sturmer began to understand that something must indeed be deeply wrong with his master.

"You and I have known each other for more than twenty years, Hans. There's not a man of all my friends knows me half as well as you do. I'm not a hero to you, Hans——"

"You are, by God," said Hans.

Roden stared, at the sound of the man's voice; at the look in his eyes. "What on earth do you mean?" he stammered.

"Eight years and five months ago I ruined your life," said Hans, his honest lips twitching. "You've never reproached me with a word from that day to this. Not with a look. I could have screamed a thousand times to see you wince in silence. Let me speak, Herr Egon. I mayn't be as clever as you'd like me to be—let me say my say for once to-night. You're cured now. Thank God, you're cured. I'd have given both my legs with gladness—but what's the use of saying it? God bless that man Barbolat! God bless that man, Barbolat!"

"I wish that I'd never gone near him," exclaimed Egon. But Hans did not understand.

"When my wife died, I was very sorry, but there's no sorrow like knowing the fault is yours. I could think of my wife without bitterness and wretchedness, but I couldn't bear to look at your leg. Why do you make me say these things, sir? It's because I can look at your leg now."

"Talk of something else, Hans. But talk."

"I went to that man Barbolat before them all, sir; I couldn't leave the hotel without going to him. I hope you won't be angry, nor tell his Excellency, your uncle. I know I'm only a serving-man from the country. All the lords and ladies and princesses were there, sir, but you'd told me to take down the luggage to the station and I couldn't wait."

"Well, what did you do? Talk!"

"I walked in and I said: 'Some of us can thank the Almighty direct,' I said, 'and some of us has to thank them as does the Almighty's work for Him,' I said. 'Your face is the face of Providence to me, mon-sieu.' And then I went away."

"Without waiting for his answer?"

"Oh, he shouted that after me, standing in his apron, his bare arms all over grease. He yelled something about nobody's miracles being proved in history, nobody's except his! He may not be perfect, Barbolat—but I wish I was a Papist all the same!"

"You—a Brandenburger—Hans!"

"Papists may pray to good people, mayn't they? Barbolat's my Saint. And a rum 'un. Count Kauenfels's

Heinz spoke disrespectful about him. He won't do *that* again." Hans Sturmer smiled down at his heavy fists.

"Hans, do you remember—when we were boys—and you hit me?"

"Don't, Herr Egon, it isn't fair."

"Hans, I wish you could thrash me to-night within an inch of my life! You—you needn't leave me the inch, Hans. But it—it wouldn't be any use."

He had started to his feet. He was pacing up and down the room, tall and straight. Hans watched his walk with delight.

"Perhaps it wouldn't even afford me the satisfaction I expect," continued Egon. He stood still, by the window, his back to the light. "What were you saying just now, Hans, about wretchedness and bitterness and thinking of one's wife? You're a better man than I, Hans."

Silence—the sudden silence of expectation, of intuition—on Hans' part. The silence of utter bewilderment and dismay.

"It doesn't take much to be that, God knows."

"I'd forgotten my message," said Hans in a flutter.

"The gracious lady is coming here."

"What?" Egon had faced round. "You fool! You idiot! Hans! what do you mean? What are you saying? Here! Who's coming here? To-night! You don't know what you're saying. Who? What? Who's coming here!" He had sprung forward. However he might appreciate his servant, he was very near flying at his throat.

"Aurélie told me the gracious lady was coming," said stolid Hans. "They believed the gracious lord to be dangerously ill."

"Oh, forgiveness to the dying," laughed Egon, but his tones were full of hope.

"I have nothing to do with this stupid talk of illness," he added, presently. "Is it your doing?"

"Aurélie told me," replied Hans. "I'm sure I don't know how she got at the idea. You were looking very white on the boat."

"Oh, indeed."

"I thought it was sickness."

"I suppose it was. And she really said my wife was coming!"

"Oh, please, Herr Egon, tell me! We were boys together, as you just now condescended to say."

"What?" Egon fixed his eyes on those of his henchman, as if his gaze could lay bare the one heart he could trust upon earth.

"What is it makes you so wretched? I have never seen you so wretched, not even when the professors went away. I thought we were all going to be happy. And—oh, my God, what has happened, master, to make you look like that?"

"Tell me one thing first before I answer you. If all the world were to say I had done an evil action, and I were to tell you it wasn't true, whom would you believe?"

"You," said Hans bluntly.

"Then I know that, whatever happens, I shall keep at least one friend till the end of my life." Egon walked back to the window, staring into the darkness. "Did Aurélie say she was coming at once?"

"I believe so."

"They ought to have been here long ago! Why should the gracious lady come to this place at night, Hans? Why should I be here at the hotel?"

"It is no business of mine," replied Hans.

"I order you to speak."

"I would rather not, sir."

"But I order it."

"Well, then—I presume there has been a—a difference between—but the gracious lady will make amends."

"You think we have quarrelled, and my wife is in the wrong?"

"I should not have ventured——"

"Did you ever quarrel with your wife, Hans?"

"Sometimes."

"Were you ever in the wrong?"

"Sometimes."

Still Egon was at the window, his back to the room.

"When they tell you I have done the gracious lady a wrong, a very great wrong, you will not believe them, will you, Hans?"

"No."

Again a long silence, a dull silence of ten seconds, at least, by the clock.

"You may believe them, Hans."

When at last he turned, in the hideous half-light, he came forward a few steps, yet stopped at a distance from this friend of his boyhood, the companion and sharer of all his twenty-five years of life.

"You needn't speak to me," he said. "I don't want you to say anything. You said she was coming, did you not?"

"God curse and damn that woman!" answered Hans.

"Put away those bottles. Here, give me a glass of brandy first. I wonder, if I ran out, should I miss her in the darkness? Of course I should—she can come half a dozen ways. Hans, you're my servant—my servant; do you understand that?—you know it as well as I do. You're the only man in the world that cares for me—cares for me, heart and soul. I mean, excepting perhaps young Karl, and I've gone and deliberately thrown you away, Hans. I can't help it. Leave me now: go and see if they are coming: meet them if you can, Hans. No, don't say anything more." But he called the man back. "You're sure she said they were coming? She didn't say I was to come to the villa?"

"Quite sure."

"She might have been here half an hour ago." Left to himself, Egon began to pace up and down the room like an ice-bear in its cage. Sometimes he would stand for long spells before the dark window, looking out, looking out. The night was endless. Sometimes he fancied he was praying, and laughed at himself for imagining that God would hear such prayers as his. Was she coming? Was she coming? What were those sounds in the dark? Was that a footfall? Was she coming? My God, how long it was! How late it was! What did Hans think of him, he wondered? What did it matter? Would she never come?

His pride broke away from under him. He sank down on his knees by the window-sill and prayed. Let her come! Let her come! That was all. Let her come! Let her come!

He shut his hands over his ears that he might listen vainly no longer. He opened them again immediately for fear lest he should miss a sound.

It was not so much a sense of wickedness that overwhelmed him—after all, in spite of his own pure past, he knew well enough that men are men—what bore him down was the consciousness of the great wrong he had brought upon Dorothea, she being she when he married her, loftily, placidly innocent as a dove from the nest. He knew she was not as the ten thousand decent daughters of worldly mothers who have read "Autour du Mariage" and are

waiting to be asked. He might have proposed to any number of honest women, who, now hearing his story, would laugh to think there was such a fuss. He had found Dorothea at Nice with her father: he had rescued her from her *entourage*; he had taken her to his bosom—God! his sin against her was a sin beyond redress!

She would come to him. He would humble himself to the dust. She would come. She would come.

The first streaks of dawn sent their dimness through the casement. The heavy darkness lightened in desolation and cold.

He got up, numbed: his face was white. Amber and crimson, the far clouds seemed to mock him. The bells of San Giulio rang out the empty day.

He rose to his feet. He knew now that she would not come. The swift hope of his soul's awakening was ashen as the cheerless morn.

He rushed from the room and ran—he could run now!—up the slopes to the Villa Bel Respiro.

On the terrace in front of the house stood Hans, blue with cold.

"You need not tell me," said Egon. "She is gone. Why did you not come back?"

"She passed me in the night, just as I reached the house here. She said to me, 'Stay!' and I stayed."

"But why? You might have warned me!"

"I thought all I could do for her now was to obey her!" replied Hans simply.

"Thou art right, Hans. All we can do for her now is to obey her. Come, let us go into the house."

On the stairs sat Aurélie, in superabundant weeping. But she dried her tears immediately at sight of the men.

"Madame is gone," she said. "Doubtless to the station. She has taken away no luggage. Only an evil-smelling dog with a broken leg."

"But she had wraps?" exclaimed Egon.

"*Tiens*, no need to ask if Monsieur loves her! Ah, Madame, Madame,—poor silly dovelet! You little know from what a husband you are running away!" Aurélie stood at the head of the stairs.

"All the same, Monsieur, it is a vast mistake! Permit me to say it, I am very angry with Monsieur! It is not an ordinary mortal should have married my mistress. Madame should have wedded a St. Francis. Ha, ha!"

"Peace, woman! Tell me, did she leave me a letter?"

"No letter. Not a word. Therefore, were I Monsieur, I would haste to the station. The train does not depart till a quarter-past six."

Egon ran to the door. Suddenly he stopped, looked away to shy Hans, half-hidden in the dusk. "True, all I can do for her now is to obey her," he said.

He went into the big drawing-room. The dead-grey ashes lay chill upon the hearth. A lamp—her reading-lamp—guttered, yellow, by a table on which lay her work. He stood by the fireplace, his hands in his pockets, his drawn face miserable and wan.

CHAPTER XIII.

"MONSIEUR will have some breakfast," said Aurélie, in decided tones. She deposited the shiny tray on the table, and dexterously whisked under a sofa her late mistress's fancy work and book.

"It is a fine day," said Aurélie, drawing aside the curtains. There was a wealth of philosophy in her tone. "Faugh!" She carried off the lamp. "Presently there are half a dozen words I should desire to speak to Monsieur."

He shook himself. "Say them now."

"Not unless Monsieur drinks his coffee. See, then, it is only this. Temporarily, as I understand matters, the household of Bel Respiro has come to an end. Much to the regret of the basement. I have known families less desirable to live in."

Egon did not reply.

"For me also—alas, then!—there is no occupation at present. Madame has run away from me. I have sacrificed myself anew on the altar of devotion. Like Monsieur, I am too wise to run after Madame."

He would have dismissed her, but she hurried on:

"I come to Monsieur with a request. From Hans I hear of the plans of the Lady Archibald. Miladi is looking for a maid. I would offer myself under the protection of Monsieur."

"Had you not better enter some different family?"

She glanced at him quickly, with her little sharp eyes. "But no, Monsieur, it would seem to me I were better in this."

"Well, I will see," he answered wearily, turning again to the dead-grey fireplace.

"Drink, then, your coffee," she said, at the door, and was gone. She spent the rest of the morning packing up her late mistress's belongings. And, as she folded article after article—never was a better packer!—she mused on the dead and gone beauties—dead and gone, as far as her life

was concerned—for whom she had done similar work. "Madame de Viroflay left everything behind her," she reflected. "Dora Standerton had told Pickford's man to call for her boxes. I preferred Jennie Viroflay." She spread out some admirable laces with a sigh. The whole trousseau had been pretty well her own careful selection. "Never again allow your attachment to your mistress to stand in the way of your perquisites," she wrote to herself, regretfully, that night.

Egon, having roused himself, with a jerk of the mind, from his torpor, went out through the drawing-room window into the early morn.

All nature had awakened. Beyond, on the exquisite island, with the silver mirror around it, the white convent buildings lay glittering in the sun. Masses of dark laurel and camellia bushes shone radiant under the pale-blue sky. A twitter of birds arose in the branches. Millions of God's diamonds filled the white landscape. Only the devil hides his diamonds away.

A flight of loud sparrows sank fluttering about the terrace, *her* sparrows, that sought their accustomed meal. He went to get some biscuits from the breakfast-tray, and stood scattering crumbs in the sun.

She had gone home to the aunts, to uncle Tony. His cheeks burned. The whole thing was over. He could endure much—had not all the last years been years of disappointment and suffering?—but he could not endure the thought of Dorothea's scorn. What was he, after all, to claim a woman's admiration? She had married him, probably from pity, as women so easily do. Uncle Karl, who knew all things unworthy of knowing, had said rightly. She had married him because of his limp. And all these months he had lived uselessly beside her, occupied with studies she could not appreciate, or with sports she condemned. No wonder she despised him. The money was hers. And now even the cause of her compassion had quitted him. Nothing was left in his empty existence but the great wrong he had done her, a wrong that remains.

She was safe yonder at Brodryck. He would not pursue her: let her rest assured. Rather would he fly from her righteous reproaches to the uttermost ends of the earth. He gasped. He knew that the look of her child-like eyes would follow him, that the tones of her voice would ring, through long nights, in his ears. "I love you. I love you.

Don't touch me. I love you." With firm step he paced the terrace. He was well now, at last! A career was open before him. By some means, by hard work, he would climb upwards. Yonder, in the far German colonies, in Cameroon, where soldiers were needed, where home-barriers had fallen, sword in hand, he would fight his way to the front.

A great calm fell upon him. For, like all men worth the name—'tis their virtue and their crime—he could rise from love to work, and be glad. He saw the future open out before him in a halo of success. At last! At last! The dream of his life was realised. He would be a soldier, after all. Not a mere garrison-dawdler and dancer. Beyond any dreams, a hard worker in active service. A man can be born a Roden: he can marry an heiress, because she compassionates his infirmity: he must gain the Iron Cross for himself.

Amid the wide mirror the convent buildings lay glistening. Over all nature was peace. In the far distance, along the horizon, rose the clear ridge of the mountains, lofty, aspiring, in the pure, unclouded day.

Hans stood before his master with a telegram. The master took it, avoiding the servant's gaze.

"Return at once. Your uncle has had a stroke. Kauenfels."

"We start at twelve," said Egon, and handed the paper to Hans.

The latter, on his way upstairs, was hailed into Dorothea's room by Aurélie. "Well?" demanded the inquisitive handmaid, sitting down in a whirlwind of silks.

He told her.

"'Tis the best thing that could possibly have happened," she said, and laughed into the valet's glum face.

"What? Back to that place? To that woman?"

"Even so, stupid. The worse he behaves now, the sooner she will feel compelled to forgive him. As long as she thinks she is doing it for her own sake, she will never return to him, but she'll have him back immediately to save his soul."

For a moment Hans Sturmer's countenance assumed a look of blank amazement, at thought of the soul of a Roden undergoing anything less than salvation. Then he turned to his packing. "I am going straight off with you to Montreux," said Aurélie.

"But supposing Lady Archibald don't want you."

"Dickie's no fool. She will realise the immense value to her, in her new position, of a maid like me. German etiquette is no joke, and she knows it. She will have to take life more seriously than with poor silly Archie. Have I not been eighteen months with the Princess Fürstenfried?"

"You are a wonderful woman," said Hans. "Do you speak Chinese as well as Italian and German?"

"And Russian," answered Aurélie coolly. "For me it will be a lucrative place."

"I cannot understand your consenting to serve under one of ourselves: I could never do that."

"Do I not tell you I shall make it a lucrative place? I am thirsting to find an indifferent mistress from whom I can pilfer. I shall never, not in twenty years, attach myself to Dickie. Dickie! Yes, I shall start off straight, with you and poor Egon, to Montreux."

And she did.

CHAPTER XIV.

"He will never speak a word of sense again," said Barbolat.

"You think he is dying?" whispered Egon.

"That I did not say. On the contrary, I think he will probably last a good many years longer. Schlumpke of Berlin is a fool. But he will never again have the use of his reason. Nor has Schlumpgen, ha, ha! But look at his eyes. See he has proper care, my dear Romeo. Be sure he has proper care."

"What do you mean?" demanded Egon, alarmed by the great man's tone.

"See he has proper care, that is all. See he has proper care." Barbolat was gone.

Egon Roden remained standing by the bed. His uncle lay motionless, a block, unable to stir hand or foot. Only the eyes retained a semblance of life, struggling to clear themselves like the sun behind a thick veil of clouds. The strain after some sort of expression was a horrible sight to see.

The nephew, unable to endure the spectacle any longer, went and sat down by the window, looking vaguely out into the park. A newspaper lay on the sill; the Count's valet, a smug Berlin youth, had been reading it. "Nobody can curl my moustaches like Fritz," Roden-Rheyna used to say. "I took him from my hairdresser's on purpose."

The paper was the *Montreux and Territet Gazette*. A prominent paragraph caught Egon's eye: "On Tuesday next will take place, at the Roman Catholic Chapel, the marriage between the Reichsgraf von Kauenfels-Courmayeur and the Lady Archibald Foye, of the Marquesses of Brassingham."

He smiled bitterly at the foolish adroitness of the wording. True, Dickie, the barmaid, was a Roman Catholic. His heart bled for the poor old ladies in Germany, proud of their great Protestant name.

People in the street passed to and fro. Carriages went

by to the Kursaal. One woman flung herself forward at her brougham window, looked up, nodded, laughed. He flushed scarlet, hesitated a tenth part of a second, bowed back and looked away.

The old man on the bed made a gurgling noise. Egon advanced to the bedside.

"Goo—roo," murmured Count Roden-Rheyna. He repeated the sound, without ceasing, in distincter agitation and pain.

Egon rang for the valet. "I know what he means," answered Fritz. "He's got half a dozen sounds for different things. I've found out all but two."

"And how about the two?" exclaimed Egon with a shudder.

The smooth valet shrugged his shoulders. "I do my best," he said discontentedly. "It's no joke."

"Goo—roo, goo—roo," insisted the invalid.

"That means he's cold," said the man-servant. "He's always doing it. I'll put some more logs on the fire."

"Goo—roo—roo!" gurgled the Count.

"Could you—eh—not get him a hot-water bottle?" suggested Egon timidly. He praised Fritz on the man's return with kindly words of encouragement. Then he went up to his own room, relieved. He loathed sickness, especially in this form of abasement, an ugly thing. "The world should be beautiful, even in evil and passion," said Egon. Life was beautiful: Death should be beautiful, as his father's had been.

"Nurse him gently, I will pay you well," said Egon.

"Poor gentleman, it won't be for long."

"I am not so sure of that. Monsieur Barbolat thinks he may live for many years."

The valet looked up quickly. "Monsieur Barbolat knows everything," was all he replied.

Egon, left to his own thoughts, wandered away towards the landing-place. The air felt cold, after Orta; a north wind was blowing. Its fierce freshness pleased him. A steamer had just come alongside; he dawdled aboard, intending to cross to Bouveret and come back.

At the last moment, as the ropes were untwisting, a brougham dashed up to the landing-place. "Wait one second!" called the purser to the captain. A lady sprang out of the carriage and was hurried down the gangway. The boat had started. Giulietta stood, panting, on deck.

"Hast thou found me, oh my enemy?" she said, and looked up into Egon's face and laughed.

"I saw you," she said. "What a splendid opportunity! Come, give me your arm, the boat rolls. Let us walk about."

He hardly knew what to answer, awkward, anxious, above all, not to give her offence.

For the women we have done wrong with are the women we find it most difficult to wrong.

"Comtesse," he said, "we should never have met again."

"Do you think so, Egon?" she answered. She passed up the small deck in silence. "Well, I for one," she added, "have always rejoiced to do things I should not."

"We will cross to Bouveret," she said. "Was not that your intention? And to-night we will return to Montreux."

"No, no," he exclaimed, "I can't go as far as that. I shall get out, in a few minutes, at Villeneuve."

She shot a keen look at him, and wrapped herself closer in her furs. "If Dorothea is waiting for you," she remarked coldly, "there is no more to be said."

"Dorothea has left me."

She clutched at something, anything, a bit of rigging, then righted herself, angry, lest he should see.

"What do you mean?" she questioned with steady voice.

"I told her. She has gone home."

Giulietta turned full upon him, her mantle dropped open. "Ah!" she said, "I had no idea you loved me as much as that!" She fell back a step, "Or Dorothea!" she whispered. Before he could answer, she had resumed her unsteady walk along the bulwark. "Come," she said, "let us go below. I cannot stand this cold. Ah, why did I come?"

The boat was almost deserted at that season, at that hour. In the close-smelling, dimly-lighted cabin, a solitary individual lay huddled up in a corner asleep.

"Tell him to go to the second-class smoking place," said Giulietta.

"How can I?" She shook herself impatiently. "Men can never manage anything. 'Monsieur!' she exclaimed in a very loud voice, "would you have the great kindness to leave us alone?" She smiled sweetly. The man having started awake, her accents grew seductive. "The very great kindness to leave us here alone?"

"This place is public property," retorted the passenger. Giulietta's eyes flashed fire. "I cannot stand the motion, that is all," she said. "I am going to be horribly ill." She sank down among the cabin cushions. A moment later: "Are we alone?" she asked, and sat up. "Admit that I can act."

"I never denied that," he made answer.

"You might speak more prettily, Romeo. I do not mind the motion, but the smell of the paraffin is almost more than I can endure. This I bear for your sake."

"Let us go on deck again. There is a sheltered bit behind the funnel."

"Close the door."

He obeyed her.

"Romeo."

What could he do? He said, "Giulietta."

"Ah, you are not altogether a brute! I have been desolate since thou wentest away."

"Oh, hush!" he said. "Hush!"

"And why, pray, should I hush? Is life so long, and are joys so many? Be not a fool, Egon! Thou art as a little child."

"I would to God I was," he answered fiercely.

"Ah, now you are talking religion. I love religion. But it must come at its proper moment. Oh, comme il est beau, le moment du repentir!"

"You are wicked," he said.

"But beautiful—admit that I am beautiful! The two go together, naturally; in a man's pleasant thoughts of a woman they join. You have never known a woman who was beautiful and good."

"Yes." The stuffy little cabin was still. She burst out furiously:

"Not beautiful as I mean it. You play upon words! Your della Robbia was beautiful, I suppose, the sweet, simpering Madonna! Beautiful to look at, from a distance, like a lily, a church statue, cold and pretty, porcelain, white and blue. Not beautiful like a warm, living woman—not beautiful like me!" She had risen; her mantle was about her feet.

He stammered a few incoherent words.

"Admit that I am beautiful. If you have a spark of generous feeling left in you, at least admit that."

"God knows you are beautiful."

"What care I what He knows? Say you know it—you!"

"Were you not the most beautiful of women, I were not the most wretched of men!"

"Ah!" She sank back on the red velvet cushions. She closed her eyes.

"Giulietta, let us remember——"

"What would you have us remember?" she whispered, lying still.

"All that once, in an evil moment, we forgot."

"There could be no religion," she replied, "without sin."

"You do not understand me!"

"I understand you too well, and I answer accordingly. We will speak no more of the matter, Herr von Roden. Only let me put you one question—promise to reply on your honour, and I have done!"

"Do not put it," he said.

She had sat up again; her eyes were wide open. "I have a right to my answer—you owe it me!" she spoke. "It is not what you think it is—not a silly girl's. Do you love me? Love! love! You might say 'yes!' you might say 'no!' and never break your oath. It is this: Do you repent?"

"Yes!" he answered quickly.

"Too quickly. Of course you are sorry, for her sake. Are you sorry for your own?"

He was silent.

She sprang to the floor. "I am answered," she cried, and her voice rang out in the musty little cabin, "Oh my love! Oh my love! Oh my hope! See, we will love each other, and the rest is as dirt beneath our feet."

He endeavoured to steady himself. "Have pity on me!" he said. "Have mercy. Good God! I am human flesh and blood! Let us forget; let us separate. Remember your husband!"

"Ay! go back to your della Robbia!" she said.

"I cannot go back to any one—to anything—you know it. The future lies before me. I am going to the Colonies as a soldier. But you—you will be very happy; you are the Countess Pini still."

She stood before him in the half-light. Very simply:

"Take me with you," she said.

"A great prospect lies before you. Soon you will be one of the richest women in Europe. Remember all your

plans for the future. You are going to help beautify the world."

"Take me with you," she said.

"We shall never meet again. I shall always remember you with—with the strangest sweetness of feelings. You have taught me of a terrible happiness that—Farewell! Do not let us speak together any longer. I am going on deck."

But she flew out at him like a wild beast that is wounded by its mate. "See here!" she said, and tore a paper from her bosom and held it up to him. "See here!"

He fell back a step or two. "Impossible!" he exclaimed, with his eyes upon the paper. "Giulietta, what stupid joke is this?"

"It is no joke. Perhaps you still deem it stupid?"

"You do not intend to telegraph these words to your husband?"

"The telegram went this morning; would you like to read his reply?"

She held out a second paper; her hand trembled, and he caught at it.

"Madame, no further correspondence is necessary between us. Kindly mention to my bankers the monthly sum you desire.—COUNT PINI-PIZZATELLI."

"Ah!" she said, "did you think you alone could play drama?"

"This is madness," he said.

"Why, pray? When you started so suddenly for Orta I read your still purpose like an open book. I could not hasten off to Monte Carlo, but I was resolved on my part also to examine how the other half takes this sort of complication—see here!"

Before he could answer, she continued:

"There is no further impediment to our happiness. A mortal has but one life; let us make the most of ours." She held out her hand. The strange lights of the cabin played about her full lips and her brow.

"Villeneuve!" yelled a voice down the gangway.

"Nous sortons!" cried back Egon. He had stood quivering; he had bent over her hand—

"Nous sortons!" he cried back. The purser came lumbering down to the cabin.

"You refuse?" she gasped.

"Let us get out here; let us go back now. I do not

know what I am saying—what we are doing. What have you done? Oh, my God! what have you done?"

"I have acted a woman's part," she said scornfully. "Act you a man's. I have ruined myself for you, desiring nothing, for I thought you had returned to Dorothea." They were once more on deck, in the cold and the sleet.

"I rejoiced to think it should be so!" she said triumphantly. "To think I was destroying my future, was telling him, glorying in you! That is the woman's way! When she loves once for all and for ever. Be yours the man's. Go! be successful. Make a career."

He put her into a cab at the landing-stage, and walked back himself in the wind and the rain.

That same night he telegraphed to Pini:

"I am here. I am at your disposal.—VON RODEN."

CHAPTER XV.

"COUNT PINI-PIZZATELLI begs Herr von Roden to do him the honour of meeting him at Lyons."

That was the reply.

On the day, then, of Dickie's wedding Egon drove to the station. His uncle still lay semi-conscious and all but inarticulate. "His Excellency is safe in my hands," said Fritz. A couple of hours after Egon had started came a telegram from the Generalin announcing her arrival next day.

"It is rude of you not to come to my wedding; I shall never forgive you," had said Dickie. She had said it to every one who had stopped away, but especially to Egon, whom she had waylaid on the hotel stairs. Most people came. Count Kauenfels was exceedingly wealthy, and the days when anybody anywhere cared anything for questions of decency are dead.

"To the Lady Archibald, of the Marquesses of Brassingham——"

"If Bathildis had come to my wedding, I should have forgiven her," said Dickie to old Kauenfels.

"It would kill her to leave Monte Carlo," replied the bridegroom.

Dickie laughed. "The more reason for me to forgive her. But you know very well that is not why she stops away."

My lady had asked her future husband what rooms at the Castle of Kauenfels were in use by Bathildis. "The Terrace Rooms," he had told her. "She likes to creep out on the terrace and sun her old bones." "By-the-bye," remarked the Lady Archibald carelessly, "I have written to what's-his-name, your steward, to say that those rooms on the terrace must be cleared out for me. I have told him to repaper and upholster them with something bright, yellow and pink."

"Love!" said Kauenfels, and sat up redder than ever.

"Well?" said Dickie, and sat up too, slapping one knee with a fair, fat hand.

"They were my mother's rooms," said Kauenfels. "They've got tapestry."

"Nasty, fusty tapestry!" said Dickie.

"Bathildis has had them ever since she was a girl of eighteen—ever since her mother died."

Whereupon Dickie got up and screamed:

"Am I to be mistress of that hideous old house or am I not?"

"There! there! dear: you've not even seen it."

"Mistress of a hideous old house and a hideous old man," screamed Dickie.

"Dear creature, the neighbours will hear you! You must just do whatever you like."

"I should think so," said Dickie, and subsided, smoothing her ruffled feathers with considerable noise.

"Now you are reasonable, I will tell you some more," she said presently, when she had kissed him. "I have also written to the steward, a few days later, to say that you had told me the rooms in question were those of the Countess Bathildis, and so I must have others, the second best."

"Why on earth did you do all that?" he questioned, amazed.

"I intend to make peace with your sisters, you stupid. Of course, he had written about the rooms, and now he will send them my second letter. I am going to touch Bathildis' old heart."

He walked to the window. "Touch Bathildis' old heart," he repeated, looking out into the rain. Then he turned. "My dear, I will tell you a little story. I once had a very pious aunt. She had two sons, both officers: both ran wild, fell into debt, got cashiered. One shot himself: the other refused to do so, started a land-agency—Unter den Linden—a brass plate on the door with his name in big letters, VON STROESCHING, strove to clear himself, paid off his debts. His mother told me that, night and morning, she prayed to God to kill him—as she called it, to take him away!"

"Why?" asked Dickie, with mild interest, nibbling bonbons.

"That the name might disappear from the street."

"It is a cruel story," said Dickie. "She was a wicked woman, wickeder'n me."

He stood looking at her, close to the door. "Poor thing!" he said, with almost real tenderness, "to try and touch the heart of the Countess Bathildis!" And he went out to the notary round the corner, who was drawing up the contracts, and talked about his will.

"There is no better life insurance than making your will," he had said to Egon. "Have you noticed that a man's will, when not made *in extremis*, is always twenty years old? I fear your poor uncle is going to die, Egon. Well, well, he never had much of a constitution—unlike me—and, besides, I am a good deal his junior."

Egon, alone in the train, mused dully on death and life. Giulietta, by her wanton self-destruction, had created a terrible position for him, from whose embarrassments he could see no escape. He was by no means the sort of man who pretends to himself that he thinks life a nuisance and death a convenience: yet, for the first time since his father had taught him to love sun and shadow, he felt that there are moments in a soul's tragedy when the sudden fall of the curtain brings only relief. Perhaps, even at that moment, the formless hand of Fate was guiding Pini's fingers towards the drop.

He sighed resignedly. For he doubted whether Dorothea would greatly grieve. She was still very young. She must marry an altogether different man. She would marry again.

He flushed darkly. She might marry again in the abstract. He would like her to do so. But not the man whom he knew.

A few minutes after his arrival at the Hôtel Métropole, he waited upon Signor Pini, such being that gentleman's courteous request.

"I could not well come much farther, could I?" said Bartolommeo Pini. He put his slender white finger-tips together, and nodded his venerable white head to and fro.

"I am at your service," said Egon, standing erect.

"Quite so. But sit down. Oh, surely! My dear boy, let us get to business immediately. But there can't be any reason why you shouldn't sit down."

"This is a matter of life and death," replied Egon. "Tell me with whom you would have me speak, and I will go."

"With whom I would have you speak? With myself, of course. Whom else should we mix up in this deplorable

matter? Listen, Egon: you have done me the greatest wrong one man can do another. Admit that."

"I am here to make reparation."

"I know. According to the rules of your society, the reparation would consist in your shooting me through the heart. *Ahime!* I have been too long outside society to appreciate that sort of reparation. I remember poor Archibald at the Villa 'Arriet. And his widow marries the rich Kauenfels! I have heard that Garibaldi was wont to say: 'Never fight with a lover or a priest.'"

"Then what would you have me to do? Why did you send for me?"

"We are coming to that. But I entreat of you: quit these tragedy airs and sit down. I cannot——" He stopped, stared the younger man hard in the face, with his cruel old eyes, and smiled. "Things have come to such a pass," he said. "We must grin." He got up and rang the bell. "Bring champagne, good champagne, still, if possible, dry! And cognac, good cognac—have you got Côte blanche?—the best you have got."

As the waiter left the room, the Italian resumed:

"Yes, you have done me the greatest of injuries. My home is destroyed. I am willing to make all allowances. I know men do this sort of thing: they cannot help themselves. As for me, my mistress has ever been the blessed Virgin. No man understands the temptations that are not his."

"Discussion must be useless between us," said Egon, "unless you mean to fight."

"Are we not fighting?" replied Pini, smiling. He paused, for the waiter came in with the tray. Egon, who knew the Italian to be a temperate man, beheld him with astonishment pour out and swallow a bumper of the two drinks, mixed half and half. "*Per Dio*, we are fighting," said Pini. "You are too anxious to murder me as your brother murdered the Englishman. But Milord was a fool, and I am not."

"We can shoot across a handkerchief, if you like," replied Egon hotly. "And you can shoot first!"

Pini started, endeavouring to hide the movement in vain. "*Per Bacco*," he said, "thou art a better man than I thought." But the next moment his eyes were again cold as steel. "It is bravado," he said. "The old hate to die, and the young love to live. If I accepted thus to shoot

you like a dog, Herr von Roden, you would soon enough retract and refer me to a friend."

"Try me," said Egon. His eyes were so miserable, the other must have noticed it. He would not confess to this man, with cheap self-commiseration, that he cared not at that moment, whether to live or to die.

"You are safe, for you know I am not an assassin," replied Pini proudly. "And, besides, is your wife not between us?—ah, la nobile donna! Bellissima! Purissima! Angela di Dio! As a shield she stands between you and the man whom you have wronged."

"Do not speak of Dorothea," said Egon, his face gone white as a sheet.

The Italian poured himself out a second tumbler and thoughtfully emptied it, with steady gaze on his victim's countenance. "Let us to business," he said abruptly. "You want to fight: let us fight. But, see, I am a player: I demand equality of chances. With firearms, with the ordinary weapons, these are impossible. Nor can either of us have the faintest desire to destroy the other's life—that were foolish! What we desire to destroy is the other's happiness, eh?"

"I have no wish to touch your happiness," said Egon.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Italian, "it is that you think there is no happiness left to destroy."

"All this fighting to kill is idiotic," he added. "It means nothing between foes that are not rivals. See here, what I propose."

He got up and walked to the window: he stood looking out. "This will do," he said. "May I trouble you to come here? You see that little passage yonder, under the arch? Occasionally some one passes through it—not often. Wait and watch. If a woman come first, or a man, at your choice, you have won: I have lost. You may bid me do what you choose: I will do it. Conformably with honour. You may bid me shoot myself. If the other way, then the other way—you understand?"

"Perfectly," replied Egon, without change in his voice. But he turned a shade paler about the eyes. "The risk is hardly equal," he added. "I have no desire to make you do anything whatever."

"That is not civil to the Countess Pini. However, no matter. I make one restriction. You also may make one. Do you agree?"

"What is yours?" They spoke quite naturally, in the falling dusk of the hotel-room. Egon had taken a cigar from the table: Count Pini filled himself another tumbler of champagne.

"If you let me live, you must let me play. Your demand must have no reference to my system. Nor should I, for instance, become a Protestant to please you, or a Jew! Three things remain outside the question, but two of them go beyond saying: my honour, my religion and the system!"

"I should prefer an ordinary duel," said Egon.

"Of course," replied the other quickly, "for then you would know all the chances were on your side."

The German trembled from head to foot. "Choose," he said. "Choose! You are the offended party. As you know, the right of choice is yours. My reservation is my wife. She is my religion. Would to God she was my honour too! Choose. Make haste. Man or woman?"

A glow of satisfaction settled in Pini's glaucous eyes. "Yes," he said. "Of course: I know it. The right of choice is mine. I choose—the woman!"

They placed themselves each at a window. The hour was four of the afternoon. People were moving rapidly across the great grey square in the winter twilight. The little entry, selected by Pini, yawned black on the farther side, between tall blocks of building.

The minutes passed. A tram-car ran, jangling, along the boulevard.

From under the arch a little white dog crept forth.

"She laughs at us!" exclaimed the Italian in his native tongue; he meant the Madonna.

Then a girl, with a scarf above her shoulders, came tripping out, brightly erect. A couple of other females followed, a butcher's boy—what did that matter?—Pini was back in the dull sitting-room, facing his foe.

"I have won," he said. "I have you in my power."

He almost whispered these words, and those that followed, with low, concentrated heat and hate. His cadaverous cheeks glowed in scarlet spots. "He is drunk," thought Egon, and steeled himself, heart and frame, standing as cast in bronze.

"What can he tell me to do? He cannot torture me," reflected Egon. He felt as if this question had been with him for hours.

"I hate you—my God, how I hate you!" continued Pini. "I can say it at last: with what pleasure, what delight can I say it! Twice have you taken from me the woman on whom my heart was set. My heart, I say. Such feelings, such impulses as yours are beneath my understanding! From the bottom of my soul do I despise and condemn such existences as yours." He lifted himself to the full length of his spare and elegant frame, and with eagle eyes aloft: "I have you in my power," he said.

Egon von Roden threw back his head. "You have gained the right to dispose of my life, but not to insult me," he said. "Tell me what you desire of me, and let me go."

"Your life," said the Italian. "Your life is very dear to me: I would not hurt your life."

He paced up and down the long room twice. Was he enjoying his victim's torment, or did he find it difficult to speak? It is impossible to say.

At last he stood still, on the other side of the table, and spoke in somewhat clearer tones.

"It is you," he said, "and such as you, who destroy the Madonna's image on earth. It is you and such as you, if I understand the story, who are the serpents that crept into Eve's Paradise. Men fight with men for gold, a fair contest, as dogs for a bone. They slay women for lust, as a dog leaves his trail in the snow. God has not enough angels of heaven to defend His poor angels of earth." He laughed. "And so Bartolommeo Pini must help do the angels' work. Monsieur, you have placed yourself in my power: I bid you respect henceforth—*absolutely*—every woman you meet. That is all. By a strange caprice of fate you are married to the best, the noblest, the purest of women. She is your wife. I doubt not we have understood each other. You are bound by your honour. You will permit me to bid you a definite farewell." With a movement that was not devoid of dignity he flung open the door.

"Pray do not trouble to communicate this change in your circumstances to the Countess Pini-Pizzatelli," he said. "I myself will inform her of what has occurred."

"I have the honour to salute you," fell from Egon's lips, and he went from the room and away into the street.

The Italian, left by himself, smiled heavily. His thoughts ran on a Grand Inquisitor of his race, three hundred years

ago, who had been famed for the invention of new tortures. He drew forth the little leaden image of the Virgin which he always wore round his neck, bought for seven soldi by his mother, in his childhood, on the Chiaia at Naples.

"Madonna!" he said, "have I not done thy work this day? In the cause of yon sweet living saint who is made in thy image? Forget it not, to-night, when I go to play Lansquenet in the club of the Rue Pot-de-Bœuf!"

He rang for the waiter. "Take away these bottles," he said. "The cognac is good enough, but the champagne is not. Where does that little archway lead to? Do you know?"

"It is the entrance, monsieur, to a Registry Office for Servants."

"Indeed? Not remarkably interesting. I want nothing more." He remained dimly watching the gateway, now only just visible in the gathering night. "That accounts for the proportion of five women to one man," he reflected. "I had noticed it all day. Well, look at the zero at Monte Carlo. Naturally a player endeavours to get the odds in his favour if he can."

CHAPTER XVI.

EGON, who had come unattended to Lyons, drove straight to the station, entered a train he found waiting, and steamed back to Montreux.

The sensation uppermost in his mind was relief. But under that, and across it, played many mingled sentiments of terror—ay, terror!—annoyance and regret. The fear of himself was upon him in the future, lying centred in sweet recollection of the past. Yet he could not have well been his own father's son and not realised the humorous side of his desperate situation. Pini, of all men, intent to do him injury, forcibly extracting Hercules from a not undesirable hole, and planting him with his face in the right direction: the elements of tragic comedy were there: it was to be hoped that Giulietta would see them. Yesterday it had seemed to him as if he could never unmesh himself from the complications his own folly had called up around him; now, at least, the path of duty, if not of pleasure, lay plain. He would see at once about getting his appointment—there could not be much difficulty. His heart beat high at thought of a different life, active service, hard work in Cameroon.

As he drove to the hotel, he looked up at Giulietta's windows. They were lighted: she was there. He was glad they were lighted: he could not have told why.

He went straight to his own room: it was past midnight. He saw light through the chinks as he came down the passage, and supposed that Hans must be waiting up for him. But a woman's figure rose beside the reading-lamp.

"Die Mutter!"

Her arms were round his neck; she had kissed him on both cheeks. "To see you come walking in like that!" she said. "If only your father could have seen it!" She was in her widow's mourning, the little Generalip, with silver streaks in her flaxen hair.

"Your uncle is the same," she added. "I am glad your

father was never like that. And now tell me, how is Dorothea? I could not make out Hans at all: is Dorothea not well?"

She looked up at him, saw his embarrassment.

"Unless—unless I understand," she said, smiling happily. "I thought it was that. Well, Egon, I wish you joy."

"Dorothea has left me!" burst out the son. "She has gone back to the aunts for good—it was right she should go."

"Right!" repeated the Generalin. She left him and went and sat down by the reading-lamp. "There must be some hideous mistake."

"The mistake was that she ever married me. She was far too good for me."

The Generalin smiled. "So your father used to say of me. We had our little misunderstandings, but I never got so frightened that I ran away!"

Then he flung himself on the ground at her feet, hiding his face against her knees.

She sat silent, trembling a little—he felt it—her lips moved once or twice.

Presently she slipped down beside him, her arms all about him, her hands meeting against his brow.

"Our Father!" she stammered. "Our Father which art—our Father!"

The glare of the electric lamp lay around them: the touch of her hands was on his brow. Their heads were bent low together, in darkness beyond depth.

She had passed into her own room close by his: she had mercilessly faced herself in the glass. Her eyes were dry, her lips were firm. She had turned to the table, where stood Justus's portrait, strong and hopeful, in its leather travelling-case.

"I am glad thou art dead!" she cried.

In the silence of night she rose from the bed upon which she had thrown herself and wiped the tears from her cheeks, and went out into the deserted, dimly-lighted corridor. She stood many minutes by Egon's door: vague rumours startled her: the big building moved in its sleep—she stood listening. She fancied she heard his consistent breathing: she was vexed with him, amid all her tenderness, for his lack of pity and of pain.

The door flung wide open, and he stood in front of her.

"I was going to look after my uncle," he stammered.

They went down the long corridor together.

"Egon!" she said softly, "you are right. Go away now—go far—to Cameroon. In the future, perhaps—the future is God's! But—but for the present—yes, go—it is best." She spoke with difficulty: he felt the misery that weighted every word.

He put his hand to the door-knob, but held it back at the sound of a loud voice within.

"Hold, then, thy peace, old fool!" the valet Fritz was saying. "Ah! villain! thy day is over! Goo-roo! goo-roo! I will teach thee to disturb me. I have given thee all thou needest: let me sleep!"

"Goo-roo!" gurgled the invalid. A dull thud followed, as if of a blow. The next moment Egon had kicked open the resisting door. The next, Fritz lay sprawling on the carpet with a downpour of stars all about him.

"Pick yourself up and be gone," said Egon, turning to the bed, where lay stretched his Excellency Count von Roden-Rheyna, Hereditary Member of the Herrenhaus and Lord of the Imperial Bedchamber, with the crimsoning stain of a menial's hand across his congested face.

Passion and rage and despair filled the old man's every feature; his blood-shot eyes seemed starting from their sockets: the nostrils trembled: the blue-black veins stood out in quivering lumps. By superhuman effort he had succeeded in moving his arms a little across the counterpane, the finger-ends twitched and fumbled, the whole of his wretched dumb straining was a struggle of appeal to his nephew for help.

"Goo-gon," he gasped, and a wave of relief broke over his face as the new sound at last found utterance: "Goo-gon!"

"He means me," said Egon. "Go and rest, mother, after your journey. I will remain with him."

With an immense effort, agonising to see, the old Count half lifted his lean head. It hung distorted, discoloured with purple stains—the hot scar across it. "Always!" he said, and fell back, his eyes closing, in a faint.

Next morning, at an early hour, Egon sought Barbolat.

"My uncle has had a long sleep," he said. "He seems to be somewhat recovering the use of his speech, but the words come all wrong."

"I told you he would never talk sense again."

"And the use of his limbs?"

"I don't think he will recover it."

"But you think he will live?"

"As long as you let him."

Egon hesitated and looked away. "What do you mean by that?" he asked at length.

"What I say. If at any time I fall into your uncle's condition, I hope some one who cares for me will kill me. Did you ever hear what happened to the King of——no, I will not tell you."

"Yes, you will."

"Eh?"

"I said yes, you will."

"Do you know that you are speaking to Barbolat?"

"Yes. I believe absolutely in the wisdom, and good sense and good heart of Barbolat."

The great man laughed. Then he went and closed the door of his cabinet. "I will not breathe his name," he said, "not even to the walls. But you know there was a king in Europe, not so very long ago, who went silly—a ruler of millions. He was imbecile for years, and cared for by devoted domestics. When he died, his body was discovered to be a mass of blue sores."

"What?" exclaimed Egon.

"Pinches. He used to cry a good deal, and his children, who occasionally went to see him, thought him very discontented. Pooh! I am not going to pity him. Have you ever seen a king?"

"Certainly!"

"Yes, yes: I know. And of course your uncle is a king in a small way. But I have seen all the royalties of Europe, stripped body and soul. I am a pork butcher's son and a millionaire. If their servants get a rare chance of pinching them, it is not I will pity the kings."

"But yet——" began Egon.

"You have never nursed an old creature who was imbecile, cared for it, cleaned it, looked after it, day after day. Human nature cannot stand its fretfulness, naughtiness, dirtiness. The best becomes cruel. The kindest gives the patient a final pill. But that must be a relative. The strangers prefer to retain a lucrative post."

"You cannot mean what you are saying?"

"I mean it all. Your uncle, however, was probably not

the best of masters, Herr von Roden. Do all you can for him; you needn't do more."

Egon went to his mother: "I am not going to the Colonies after all," he said. "I am going to stay with uncle Karl."

She looked at him.

"There is no one else," he said simply. "The Child must go on with his work, and Konrad must stay with his regiment. I am free."

"Your sister and I?"

"I hardly fancy it will be woman's work."

She was silent.

"Little mother—I may still call you that."

"Egon—son!"

"He says it may last for years."

She rose.

"The future is God's," she said. "Egon, I will not reproach you. Do you know who is most in my thoughts?"

"Yes," he answered, "I see still the small room at Lugano, you and her together—poor aunt Mary! Mother, I cannot help it. I can do no more than atone."

"It is all; it is so little!" said the Generalin sadly. "It is very much; it is *nothing*. *Nothing*. The future is God's."

That same day came a letter from Giulietta, a letter of scornful farewell. Barbolat, it appears, had suddenly cured her. She departed to Naples, where her poor father was suffering from a cold on the chest.

CHAPTER XVII.

"I WONDER what it can be," said aunt Emma. She stood, staring, at the window. The long winter road, beyond the carriage-sweep, was very white about the ground, very black about the trees, very grey about the sky. It did not look at all the sort of place for anything interesting to happen in.

"What?" questioned aunt Mary, and laid down her Dorcas work.

"If I knew what, I shouldn't wonder," replied Emma. She had grown a little acidulous of late; Dorothea's misfortune had soured her, like a thunderstorm turning cream. She said so herself. "I don't dislike an acrid touch about cream, when it's good," said uncle Tony.

Aunt Mary approached the window.

Two fair-sized carts were plodding up the high-road; in front of them crept a rickety waggonette; the three vehicles made a little procession against the December sky.

"People moving," said Mary.

"It don't look a bit like it. The carts are full of boxes. Good gracious, they're stopping at our gate!"

"They're asking the way," said aunt Mary.

"Well, there's Antony; I'm glad of that," exclaimed Emma. "I don't like the look of the man who's got out of the waggonette." Nor, indeed, did Em and Doll: their shrill protests could be heard, around the strangers.

"They are coming to the house; the carts are turning into the avenue!" shrieked Emma. "Dorothea! Dorothea! Something is going to happen! Oh, what fun!"

Dorothea, who had bent over her charity flannels by the fireplace, now gently pushed the dog with the bandaged leg from off her skirt, and came forward. The dog whined after her, with great yearning brown eyes. Dorothea's face was solemn, but she smiled. All the sadness of her countenance seemed lighted into sunshine when she smiled.

The conveyance had drawn aside to let the heavy-laden

carts come up to the front door. Uncle Tony, in his brown velveteens, was expostulating vehemently with the insolent driver from the town. The stranger—a neat man in black clothes, clean shaven—stood looking on, impassive.

“That is an English servant, I should say,” remarked Dorothea. The aunts both gazed at her in respectful admiration. Since the child had gone out to see the world, just a year ago, she had suddenly grown infinitely wiser than they.

Before they could say much more, in the delicious flutter of excitement which possessed them—let those who laugh go and winter at Brodryck—before aunt Emma’s fancy had disported itself in more than a dozen wrong directions, uncle Tony and the stranger were in the sitting-room. “My dear Dorothea,” said Tony, “this person has a message for you.”

“If you please, Madam, are you Madam de Roden?” asked the person in English, “because, if so, I was to deliver this letter into your own hands. I am acting by the orders of my master, the Marquess of Brassingham, madam, if you please.” The last words were aimed at uncle Tony, who appeared unconscious of anything, even of the sniffing Em and Doll. Aunt Mary gently called the dogs away from the Englishman’s dapper, twitching little legs.

Dorothea took the letter and read its contents—German sentences straggling across the paper, as if their concocter could not quite direct their course.

“DEAR FRAU VON RODEN,

“My first husband,—poor fellow!—on the night before his death wrote me a letter, in which, amongst other things, he asked me to send you these boxes. He was good enough to say that you alone, of us all, had shown an intelligent interest in the subject. He adds something ridiculous about not addressing you himself, but, of course, he was overwrought. His desire was that the whole collection should be completed and catalogued and presented to the British Museum. Certainly, I should have neither the time nor the inclination to undertake such a work. Perhaps, under the present circumstances, you will.

“ELIZABETH,

“Reichsgräfin von Kauenfels-Courfmayeur.

“P.S.—Looks well, eh?”

A couple of men, under Caspar's unwilling direction, were dragging a cumbrous oak chest through the hall. "There's two dozen more," protested Caspar.

"The others are packing cases, madam," said the English servant. "This chest, I was to inform you, contained my late Lord Archibald's most important papers. These, madam, are the keys. There are twenty-seven large packing cases, and three small ones. My lord ordered everything to be packed; my lady was most particular about it. And I was to ask for a receipt from you, madam, if you please."

"Count the boxes!" commanded uncle Tony.

"What do they contain? *Bric-à-brac*?" cried aunt Emma. "Oh, I hope it is *bric-à-brac*. And china."

The man-servant had opened the great oaken chest. Uncle Tony, diving down amongst its papers, produced a faded portfolio, a quantity of scrap books. The carter's men were busy lining the hall and the passage. Huge boxes were piling up all over the place.

"It is Archibald's comic collection!" gasped Dorothea.

Uncle Tony had been busy untying the portfolio; a flood of highly coloured drawings now escaped from it, spreading across the carpet a suddenly brilliant corps de ballet, in a variety of poses and flesh-tints and spangles, which did honour to the caricaturist's ability and justice to the morals of the (second) Empire.

"How amazingly improper!" said aunt Emma. Aunt Mary said nothing. Uncle Tony roared.

"I believe, madam, the contents of this case are very valuable," said the servant in decorous reproach.

He and Dorothea and Tony were down on the floor together, gathering up the papers.

"Such things ought to be burned," declared aunt Emma.

Uncle Tony roared again.

"For Heaven's sake, let somebody stop those boxes!" cried aunt Emma.

Dorothea went out into the entrance-hall. One box had been broken open. Dozens of volumes of the *Fliegende Blätter* were visible, packed in piles.

Standing amongst these accumulated treasures, with the servants still heaping them up all around her, Dorothea recalled young Lord Archibald's boyish countenance: she seemed to hear again his rather foolish laugh. The man-servant had come to her elbow.

"If I saw you alone, madam," he began hurriedly, "I was to say from my lady that my lady begged and prayed you to execute Lord Archibald's last wish. My lord is angry and can't bear to have him mentioned, but my lady was his mother, you see. And there's the dog, madam, 'Flirt,' that was sent home from Italy, it appears that Lord Archibald said you was to have it, but I was to ask from my lady, might she keep the dog? and please not to betray her to my lord."

"Of course—of course she must keep him. Tell her I will do what I can."

"Then, madam, would you please to write a few words on a bit of paper to say that you have received the collection, but don't wish for the dog?"

So it came about that Dorothea had her hands full of work to overflowing—all the charity sewing aunt Mary couldn't manage, and now, into the bargain, the endless sorting and cataloguing of this wilderness of wit. Archie had done his work at haphazard. Immense quantities of labour remained. With her thoroughness, having set herself to the uncongenial task, she plodded on. Puns, jokes, Joe Millers, coarse pleasantries, clever drawings—funniness, funniness from morning to night. Her sore heart sickened in that atmosphere of laughter. She was glad to have no time for thought about herself: on the other hand, she certainly felt little desire to spend her days with jests and jesters. For the laugh of the fool is as heaviness to the soul that dwelleth in grief.

Uncle Tony thoroughly enjoyed the collection, and proved a continuous help. In fact, she could not possibly have done the work had he not shown her how. Aunt Emma gave irregular assistance, sorting half a dozen numbers and then settling down to read a seventh. Not in silence, but with shrill enjoyment and shriller indignation, both of which sentiments she expected her companions to share. There was no "objectivising" of the materials with aunt Emma in the room. Sometimes Dorothea thought the work would have been endurable but for aunt Emma.

One evening, having worried herself faint over numbers and dates, she went out, for a quick walk, in the park. The mongrel, whose limb was mended to a limp, accompanied her. She crushed the crisp snow beneath her feet. The sky was pallid and frosty. The day was dying. In solemn silence the cold world was watching him die.

Dorothea stood by the broad piece of unfrozen water: the black band in the shiny expanse. Opposite her rose the dark walls of the Manor House, the dull brown pile, with its tall blue roofs. Since her mother's death it had stood thus deserted. Great preparations had been made last summer—during their stay with the aunts—for restoring and re-furnishing it: some plans had already been executed; in all these things she had acceded, delightedly, to Egon's absolute taste. No one of her acquaintance knew one tithe of what he did about all matters connected with architecture, furniture, decorative art. The Manor House was late Dutch Renaissance. In ignorance that learned gladly she had seen two rooms already grow beautiful under his hand.

Since her return she had not been able to enter the house. Constantly she was drawn to the other side of the water. There she could linger, away from the bridge.

She now heard steps coming up behind her in the twilight, brisk steps, a man's—not uncle Tony's, yet not those of a man of the people. A silly apprehension seized upon her, a trembling. She dared not look round. The dog barked.

"My dear Dolly, so engrossed?" said the Colonel.

She turned quickly. Her father!

When last she had seen him, she had not known what she knew now! She had respected him up to a point—a willing daughter's point—for his second marriage, condoning a connection she could at least understand. For the Bible says it is not good that a man should be alone, and her father, of all men, must have found life hard as a widower.

But now she knew that he had caused her mother's death.

Before she realised what she was doing, her eyes had been drawn up to the tall black windows, on the second floor, across the water.

The whole dismal, trivial story swept across her mental sight: the happy young life in its daily confidence, the sudden vulgar crash in a servant girl's avowal, the untimely birthday morning, the white cross by the village church.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

"You didn't expect me," laughed Colonel Lewis. Sandring.

"No, father."

"All the same, I hope you're glad?"

A moment's pause, then: "You know I love you, father."

He laughed again and kissed her. "You are always so refreshing, Dolly: shall we walk back?"

"Oh, yes, yes: let us come away from here."

"It is damp, but all Holland is damp. As I was saying: you are always so refreshing, Dolly: you act upon me like a shower-bath. That doesn't sound pretty, but I mean you are so morally bracing, quite hydropathic. On the whole, for a father and daughter who have met late in life, it seems to me we get on first-rate. We understand each other perfectly"—he tucked her arm under his arm—"I admire you from the bottom of my soul, and you love me and wish I was goodier—eh?" He looked into her face.

"But you don't think me so very bad, after all—do you?"

The tears were in her heart. She smiled. "You know I don't think you any worse than me, father, but I wish you had the comfort I've got."

"Comfort? I don't need any comfort, my dear. I'm pretty comfortable on the whole, I can assure you. But you—you: yes, I am very sorry. My heart bleeds for you. I want to say half a dozen words to you—I may, mayn't I?"

She stopped short. "How did you know?"

"Aurélié wrote, your former maid. She is with the Countess Kauenfels."

Dorothea blushed scarlet.

"If you would let me say just one sentence, an unkind sentence, it would be: 'I told you so.' I told you so at Nice, child. I told you at Lugano. You were angry with me then: you will probably be angry once more. All the same, I must speak. You wronged Egon from the first. No man wants to be loved for his moral perfections, which he knows very well don't exist. No man, not an idiot, or a cad. And the love which is built on such a pin's point is bound to come down with a crash."

"Oh, don't," she said, "don't." They had gone round by the bridge. The great desolate Manor House seemed to cry out to her.

"Yes, I will. I feel like a surgeon. A woman must love a man in spite of his faults, Dolly, or she'd much better not love him at all."

"His *faults*!" She had loosened her arm. Her voice, her attitude, were splendid in their sore indignation.

"You wilfully misunderstand me," replied the Colonel rather testily. "The big things come later, when the little things have gone wrong."

"Then, in fact, you blame me."

"I never blame any one, least of all a woman." He had taken a pace ahead: he turned round and looked straight at her. "Well, yes, if you like to put it so, I blame you. When a man's dull, he looks for music. When a man's cold, he calls for blankets. He must have his creature comforts, and his soul comforts. Comfort is what a man requires. *Giulietta* sang wonderfully, and she had artistic perception. She had a lot of soul-cushions handy for *Egon* to flop down on. Man at his best, in his virtues and his failings, is very like a fine-tempered dog, and woman, at her best, is first cousin to an angel. My dear, they marry, and it can't be helped."

They walked on in silence. "Women like you shouldn't marry," he said presently. "No, they shouldn't marry, women like you—and she!"

Dorothea heard in amazement: his voice was broken. He kept his face turned away.

The great house still frowned upon them as they walked along the water-side.

She could bear no longer his averted face, the thought of his husky voice. She crept close to him and put her arm about his neck, and drew his cheek towards her as one might draw a child's.

"I was speaking of your mother," he said.

She answered: "I knew."

"You knew. Oh, *Dorothea*, yet you kissed me!"

For only answer she kissed him again.

Jealous, the dog leaped up at them, barking.

"Child, I have never been back again here—never seen that house—since the day when we took her to the church-yard yonder. But the place has never been out of my memory: I have seen it at night on African battlefields, by American camp-fires. I'm not going to be sentimental, d—— it. (I beg your pardon, *Dorothea*.) I—I can't say I'm especially remorseful. 'Twasn't my fault: I can't make myself different from what nature made me. But seeing that place again all of a sudden, and you, *Dorothea*, and to think that you—you're not going to die, are you?"

"No, father."

"That's right. You and Egon are going to live happily for years. We shall have plenty of time to talk about it. And that brings me to another subject. Mrs. Sandring is here."

"In Holland?"

"With your aunts. Perhaps we had better go back and ask them to give us some tea."

"We had indeed." Dorothea wondered what, at that moment, the Baroness was saying to her hostesses.

"Yes, we are both here. And, in fact, we have got a little plan. We want to keep you company, Dolly, till this little storm has blown over."

"But the house is too small!" exclaimed Dolly.

"That great place? I suppose it is nearly ready by now. And Blanche will immensely enjoy helping you with what remains to be done. She has excellent taste of a kind, very modern. She will help you to delectable bedrooms, now that Egon has got you the Louis Something saloons."

Twice already her father had lightly mentioned his name, the name which her little household avoided, as we pass, on tiptoe, a chamber of pain.

"She will do you a lot of good," he went on. "You can't think how comfortable she makes me. Your aunts are most estimable ladies, Dolly: I admire them. But I don't think they're the sort of society you stand in need of just now."

"I don't know," said Dorothea, distraught, "but the house isn't ready, the——"

"Oh, you can have in half a dozen servants from any registry office for six months. Brussels would be best, perhaps. People speaking French and Flemish, as Blanche suggests. She can manage all that for you, and willing. Then, when we've started you thoroughly, in first-rate style, we'll have Egon back and make him cry 'Peccavi.'"

Dorothea was trying to collect her scattered thoughts.

"It seems impossible," she said faintly. "Impossible!"

"Dear darling, how little you know of the world! As soon as he realises that you are established here at the Manor House, Lady of Brodryck, with carriages and horses and the Louis—Quatorze, isn't it?—saloons, and a good cook, a first-rate cook (Blanche is right about that)—oh, Lord! It was a great mistake bringing him here to the aunts' little pottering villa. You've made a lot of mistakes, Dolly. Blanche 'll tell you about them."

"Impossible," murmured Dorothea.

"And you'll do her good. You remember the little book you gave her? A pious little book: she thinks a great deal of it. She always has it lying on her bed-table. Even in the hotels. She has, by Jove. She says she couldn't sleep without it."

Dorothea did not answer.

"She's getting much more serious-minded: it's her time of life. Only the other day she said to me: 'I want to have a good talk about religion with Dorothea.' And I don't deny, besides, that you will do a good action, at this moment, by taking us in. You know how I loathe any allusion to money. But you did me a bad turn by refusing Pini, Dolly. He's never told me the whole truth about his system. I've had a run of ill-luck at Monte Carlo. And—and—it's utterly ridiculous to think that the Baroness and I can live on a thousand a year."

So he rattled on till they reached the little gate that leads from the park into the old ladies' garden. There she said: "Father, I'll do for you whatever I can."

"And we for you, child. That's right. If relatives only stick together, they always pull each other through."

The quondam Baroness de Fleuryse was seated on the old red sofa in the middle of the drawing-room. There seemed to be a great deal of her in her loosened putty-coloured travelling-cloak, lined and trimmed and overflowing with a lot of still lighter, fluffy fur. Her fair hair, elaborately fringed, formed a sort of tiara above her pink-and-white cheeks, and over the hair rose a mountain of feathers. Dorothea fancied the sofa looked redder than usual beneath its burden. She reddened for it. And she thought of that other crimson settee, on which she first had seen the Baroness seated in the hall of the Grand Hôtel.

Opposite her, far distant, sat the aunts, in distracted contemplation. Uncle Tony lolled up against the fireplace, with the air of a man of the world. Em and Doll sat well forward, on the carpet, in front of the newcomer, expectant. "Quiet!" exclaimed uncle Tony with vehemence, for Em had snarled.

"So he never tried to cheat his wife again!" Mrs. Sandring was saying; her voice rose in merriment—she had a musical laugh—and Tony's "Ho! ho!" blended with it. Dorothea wondered how many stories the aunts had already

enjoyed. Aunt Mary's countenance expressed restrained disapproval, aunt Emma's rampant contempt.

The French lady had set herself at once—as was her nature—to captivate simple, goggle-eyed uncle Tony, “a dear old purple ‘hobereau’ with a dear old knitted vest.” Also, she was not such a fool as not to realise exactly what would horrify the aunts and what would win their approval. “Lewis, I intend to shock them,” she had said. “I will do whatever you like for Dorothea. But you must let me breathe freely before those aunts, or I shall suffocate.”

Therefore, immediately, she started fair. That evening—the tea-table, dinner with Caspar in attendance, the long wait for the final bed-candles—that endless evening lives in Dorothea's memory.

The Baroness came down in an absurdly inappropriate dinner-gown, pink silk embroidered all over with pale green chrysanthemums. Uncle Tony, who had hurried home, turned up in his wonderful swallow-tail coat, with two yards of black satin supporting, like a wall, the broad basin of his gleaming collar, whereupon his red head reposed, as if severed from the body. He had shaved himself a second time, hurriedly, as was proved by a scratch or two, a bit of black plaister, and a general appearance of rash. The Baroness was very charming to him. He reminded her, as she told the Colonel, of the men she used to meet at her father's, when a girl. “*Les gentilhommes qui ne sont plus*,” she said. The Colonel bowed.

So the second Mrs. Sandring made her entrance at Brodryck. Her good-nature and appreciation of the dignity of charitableness caused her to sympathise, in a limited way, with aunt Mary. She did a certain amount of charity-sewing (so uneven, it all had to be taken out again): and she patted the heads of the school-children and smiled to the peasants, who resented such grins as an insult. With aunt Emma she lived in open war. Emma said Antony's conduct was “disgusting.” And gradually the French lady got her own way in all things unessential about the Manor House. She told Dorothea she was weary of the wicked world. Up to a point this was true. She did not tell that her hair was so rapidly changing colour she had made up her mind at last to change its hue to a reddish auburn, the only dye that grey hair will successfully take. Nor did she dwell on the other, pecuniary, reasons

for her *villegiatura*. She was full of good, sensible advice about "that naughty boy: I should like to slap him." And often she was really mournful, despondent about a youth that would certainly never return, and desirous of "the consolations of religion." After much discussion with the aunts, and varied protests from either lady, Dorothea suddenly gave way to her father's non-repeated wishes. She felt that, at any price, the Baroness must be removed from the villa. Servants were got together—half the aunts' selection, half the Baroness's, black and white, like a chess-board. The old house was put to rights. And thus, between her father and his second wife, Dorothea took lonely possession of her mother's ancestral home.

"It may be the saving of Mrs. Sandring's soul," said aunt Mary. Aunt Emma scowled at uncle Tony.

"Or the loss of some other people's," said aunt Emma.

The Colonel appeared contented, avoiding one corner of the mansion, but not objecting to the memories evoked by the rest. "Death is an ugly fact," said the Colonel. Mrs. Sandring clutched at the little book and deposited it where she could see it if she happened to wake up in the middle of the night.

Dorothea instituted daily prayers. The Colonel could not possibly manage to be down at half-past eight. Mrs. Sandring heroically did manage, somehow. She entreated the Roman Catholic servants to come too: she almost went down on her knees to her excellent French cook. But he wouldn't, and left. That was the only occasion of any real quarrel between Dorothea and her father.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON a beautiful February morning, all sunlight and shimmering orange-trees, the Countesses Bathildis and Frederica von Kauenfels sat side by side in their big wicker chairs, their bigger black shawls, and their biggest straw hats, under the trellised verandah of their house at Monte Carlo, the Villa St. Etienne.

The two aged Countesses Kauenfels were not people of importance in the life of Monte Carlo. Such a fact, however, they were by nature incapable of feeling. Not personally—they were humble enough in their way—but representatively, they would have considered themselves pre-eminent anywhere. At Monte Carlo, where you could as soon appear *sans titre* as *sans culotte*, nobody respects you for anything except for not being respectable. And the Countesses Kauenfels were eminently respectable. They were not good like aunt Mary and aunt Emma, but they were created to inspire awe. They were therefore quite out of place on the Riviera, whither asthma or bronchitis had condemned them, and where your only chance of success, if you cannot be disreputable, is in a much smaller, insignificant set, with prayer-meetings and tea.

Of the two sisters Frederica was the paler individuality. The more interesting, perhaps. Frederica lived in bygone times, when knights were knights, and died for love. The tournament and the joust were her ideals of amusement: she looked at the world of to-day through a Gothic castle window. Her own long existence had glided away in the slow completion of the hand-made Kauenfels tapestry, one compartment of which, in Bathildis' rooms, had been left unfinished from 1535 to the days of Frederica's youth. It was her glory that now, in her grey old age, she had nearly ended the beautiful, monstrous work. She was quiet, dignified, contemplative of days and things that are long since hopelessly dead and embalmed. Her real antiquarian knowledge, her mental calibre generally, may be gauged

by the sentence which willingly rose to her lips: "I adore the Middle Ages."

The ladies were not generous: they therefore suggested no object of interest on that side. They were credited with the poverty which goes so well with foreign rank. "All German Countesses are beggars, I believe," said the chaplain's bustling wife, Mrs. Sidebotham, who was a beggar herself, from morning to night, for all sorts of charitable institutions. Bathildis was not shadowy and mediæval, but double-chinned, managing, full of to-day. Herself, her close crowd of relations, her wide circle of co-equals: the daily existence of some seven hundred German importances exactly as important as she (fathers, mothers, babies, from the cradle to the grave), these formed her entire occupation, over which she had been perfectly happy for years sixty and five. The evil-doings of Franzl had not greatly disturbed her. Such things were inevitable, were part of a family. The Kauenfels of Regency times (Franz Friedrich) and his grandson, the Pompadour Kauenfels, had seen very different goings-on in their, now demolished, garden-house of Sans Soucis. Bathildis did not believe in her sister's white knights who swore fealty to a vision for ever. She had done all she could in the way of proposing uncongenial brides to her brother: she had wept bitterly over the approaching extinction of the family, the only real trouble of her easy life's journey. Her own little romance with Egon's father has already been referred to. Interested in her good-looking connection, if not actually in love with him, she had heard him say, behind a door, that all plain women ought to be drowned. She had fancied the words referred to her, as perhaps they did, for she knew that a match had been proposed between her and Justus Roden. She had good-naturedly made up her mind to forgive him, but she rarely looked in her glass without recalling his phrase.

Now old, half blind, asthmatic, interested in births, marriages, and deaths as ever, she had been brought face to face with her brother's "disaster." She was not eloquent in abuse: she spoke, irremediably, of "The Disaster." If one of her intimates, you might hear her speak of it. And your face would assume the expression it takes in the presence of bereavement.

"Diese entsetzliche Person" was the reigning Countess of Kauenfels. Bathildis recalled every incident of Karl

von Roden-Rheyna's lunch party last year. She was always reminding Frederica of those incidents. "You remember, my dear, how she said: 'Give my compliments to Franzl, and tell him not to drink too much beer.' And now has come the disaster." The silent tears coursed down Frederica's pale cheeks.

"Frederica," had said Bathildis, "it is impossible to predict what may happen, but one thing, at least, I shall prevent. That innocent girl, Hilda, shall not come into contact with the Biermädel. I have written for her to be sent here at once by Fraulein Schmitz. I hope you approve!" Bathildis always managed everything in the household, but she always said "I hope you approve!"

So Hilda, who was not yet twenty, arrived at Monte Carlo. She thought the place was lovely, and enjoyed it in a quiet way from morning to night. When the weather was fine, the old Countesses sat out in the verandah: when it was not, they remained in their small drawing-room. They never went near the Casino, and but seldom to the German Church. They always returned a call within forty-eight hours, and left cards upon all the German Highnesses that came to the hotels. They knew exactly what everybody ought to do under every circumstance, and, for their part, they did it. A chief subject of conversation between them was that others did not.

One day, shortly before the Carnival, Konrad turned up. Konrad von Roden, the officer. And thereby hang a few words of explanation, for the people who know about such matters will laugh at the idea of his having got a furlough again.

Konrad was at Darmstadt, cursing his hard fate and getting into fresh entanglements, but not of the sort that really entangle a man like Konrad. Love is a net whose meshes are ever too large or too small. Meanwhile there came letters from Dickie full of comic descriptions of Kauenfels: Konrad roared as he read.

But there also came a letter from Egon, which told of uncle Karl's serious illness, and the sick man's departure, with his caretakers, from Montreux to the Castle of Rheyna.

Konrad got this letter in bed: his military servant brought it up with his breakfast. He yawned when he saw the superscription, presuming the contents to be some tiresome message from his uncle about his allowance. But

when he had gathered what his elder brother really had to tell, he sat up with a jump.

"By—Jove!" he cried. "What are you staring at, you fool?"

The servant disappeared with alacrity. The master retained his horror-struck attitude. "By Jove!" he repeated softly, aloud, "Egon's alone with the old man at Rheyna. If he squeezes his weasand half a minute, the hypocrite's lord of Rheyna for ever and aye!" The suggestion seemed to shoot him aloft with impatience: he leaped out of bed. "Idiot! Idiot!" he said at himself in the glass. He began hurrying on his clothes, as if *that* could be any use. "Good Lord!" he muttered a dozen times while dressing. It was absurd of him, with his views on all subjects, to say the words once, and that is why he said them a dozen times.

He hadn't had time to marry. No, by George! he hadn't had time to marry. The whole thing had only taken a couple of weeks. Who could have thought that uncle Karl would go to pieces like this without any warning? The alteration to which the Emperor had consented permitted his marriage within a year of the death of the former heir—his father—but it still confined the casting of lots, if such casting there was to be, to married candidates only. Therefore, if uncle Karl were dying at this moment, everything was Egon's.

He got into his uniform and, a little less carefully groomed, a little less sallow complexioned than usual, he dashed down into the street and into a cab. "To Privy Councillor Poffendorf!" he shouted—mentioning the name of the first physician in the town. He begged to be admitted instantly. There were half a dozen others before him. He could pass before the poorer people, being an officer, but he had to wait ten endless minutes while a rich Jew banker was discoursing about his liver. The minutes were the longest period of his life: unaccustomed to delay, he tramped about the waiting room. At last the doctor's bell rang, he was admitted.

"My uncle has had a fit: do people die of a fit?" he said.

"It depends on the fit," replied the doctor.

"It's the sort of fit that you tumble down in, and you can't speak, or, at least, you only gurgle, and you can't move hand or foot."

"My dear Herr von Roden, it is quite impossible for me

to answer your question. A man can fall dead of an apoplexy and he can take several days dying, and he can recover partially or altogether—till next time." The old Privy Councillor looked shrewdly at his questioner from under bushy eyebrows, and wondered where the young man's interest came in.

"My poor uncle!" cried Konrad, distressed; he bit furiously at his silken moustache.

"He is an old man," said Poffendorf cautiously.

"But a tough one! I mean his health has always been exceedingly good."

"Then he *may* recover," opined the doctor rather spitefully, for he imagined that Konrad wanted the poor gentleman to die. And his sympathy, he being old, was with the uncle. "However, I can affirm nothing, absolutely nothing," he added. Konrad laid down his fee and came away in a fume. Driving across the Luisenplatz, he met the regimental surgeon: in a minute he was out of his *droschke*.

"I say, doctor, does an old man usually die of a fit?"

"Yes!" said the doctor.

"Oh, rubbish! You army doctors don't know anything."

"Thank you!"

"Well, anyhow, not about *old* men! How could you? I bet you've never seen anybody in a fit!"

The young doctor bridled. "Dozens!" he answered vaguely, but with all the decision of untruth.

"It's my uncle. I want to know, is he going to live or die?"

"Poor chap!" said the doctor sympathetically. "It is very good of you, very good indeed, to care so much about your uncle."

Konrad stared, and was going to say something energetic—but why condemn the virtues with which others adorn us?—"If the old man gets better you shall have a bottle of champagne," he answered, and drove off to the post office. To his anxiously inquiring telegram—anxious indeed!—came a sedative reply:

"No immediate danger, but restoration considered impossible. May live for months."

"That decides me," said Konrad.

In fact he had no alternative. His uncle would never recover and find out. He loathed his military duties,

which had always seemed to him "superfluous." This time he successfully threw up his commission, got rid as conveniently as was possible of his shackles, and managed to be at Monte Carlo in time for the Carnival. With great satisfaction he had heard from his mother that uncle Karl continued to improve. "The Head" now drove about in a garden chair, ate heartily, and was imbecile. He spoke a few words, using wrong ones, and played with toys. "Egon nurses him with steady devotion," wrote the mother. "He sleeps in his bedroom, for your uncle has to be helped like a child. He won't allow any one near him since that terrible experience with Fritz. We are very quiet here; you can imagine what a life it is."

Konrad had a fit of trembling over this letter. "Won't allow any one near him! H'm," he said. He felt confident that Egon was watching for an opportunity to have done with uncle Karl. In feverish haste he ran off to Monte Carlo and the Countesses Kauenfels.

"I know nothing against Konrad," said Bathildis.

"The duel?" suggested her sister.

"Not as such," replied Bathildis with promptitude. "You mean, because by it was occasioned, indirectly, the Disaster? Indirectly, Frederica. We cannot be too careful in apportioning blame."

"I have heard that he is a little wild," ventured Frederica, blushing.

"Now, these are your ridiculous ideas about Knights of the Holy Grail! Of course, he was a little wild, like all of them, but we need not tell Hilda. You never heard that Egon was wild," continued Bathildis viciously. "But Egon was a Lancelot, a Lancelot of the Lake—of Orta, or Geneva?—a Lancelot with a choice of lakes!" This idea diverted the canny old creature, she chuckled over it again and again. Then she took up some terrible knitting, and began making grey mittens for Franzl. Every year, on his birthday, she sent him a pair; she had done so for more than twenty years, never deigning to inquire what he did with them.

"Hilda, the poor, sweet darling!" said Frederica.

"The poor, dear darling!" said Bathildis. "One thought gives me rest," continued the elder sister. "Whatever misfortunes it may please the Almighty to bring upon our house, He cannot touch the money we have saved up these twenty years for Hilda."

"He could if He chose, I presume," suggested Frederica.

"He could *not*; it is invested in Prussian Consols."

"But He never would choose," added Frederica gently.

"I don't know; He has permitted Franzl to marry the Biermädel. But, there, I've no wish to influence your Gothic religion. Nor to meddle with and manage the Almighty. My business is to look after ourselves. And Hilda, as I was telling Konrad this morning, will have forty thousand pounds to her fortune, from *us* on the day of her wedding." Of course the old lady said eight hundred thousand marks; it sounds well. But forty thousand pounds has a pleasant fatness about it also. In this disgusting age we are doomed to inhabit there is nothing sounds better than "forty thousand pounds." Unless it be forty-one.

The world has known times when the music of other glories filled its atmosphere; the clash of arms, the ring of cymbals, the bray of heralds' trumpets, the clang of high dispute!—those days are over for the present; we hear the chink of the sovereigns that fall in the cheater's counting house. It is all we care to hear; we hope he will take us into his company. So he does, when the company is worthless.

Fresh periods will arise when we are dead. God's gardens, like man's, have their seasons of dung. A cleaner condition will come into existence when the compost now hoarded by half a dozen filchers has been spread over all the fields. What, in that far-distant future, will be the lot of the mine-directors, the company-promoters, of the few who now reap where many have sown? Perchance they will be set to harmless tasks by the new Government. It were interesting, for instance, in the Socialist state, that will be not so good as the old free growth, but better than the present canker, to find a couple of yesterday's petroleum or iron-kings employed in the manufacture of verses on Equality as an honest means of earning their frugal meal. Prophecy pales at the view. Or at thought of the verses. But this paragraph, like life, is a digression, inartistic, like life. It is closer than you think to Bathildis: it is the shade against which sits her figure, in its own self-made sunshine, serenely contemplative of forty thousand pounds.

"And, also, dear Hilda is heiress to Franzl," said Frederica.

"Humph!" replied her sister. Presently she added: "Frederica, there is one thing I am yearning to know. If that terrible person were to have a child—and such people always have quantities of children——" She paused; her eyes were on the prospect.

"Well?" said Frederica at last.

"Should I be glad or should I not?" burst out Bathildis.

"Of course you would be glad," replied the younger Countess simply. "And the children's children would sleep in the tapestry rooms. It is the old, old story of the King and the Beggar-maiden. Look at the bright side, Bathildis."

"The *Beer*-side," said Bathildis with unutterable scorn. "I do not think Hilda is plain? Frederica,"—with some anxiety—"should you call Hilda plain?"

"She has such sweet eyes," said Frederica.

"Of course she is plain, or we should not talk about it like this. Never mind, she is not of the ugly women that ought to be drowned. And they don't drown 'em either!" said Bathildis, smiling fiercely.

A bright laugh, a happy girl's laugh, came ringing up from under the terrace. "Hush!" whispered Bathildis, and the two old ladies—bundles of black cloth and broad-ribboned hats and white umbrellas—toddled along to the further side and looked over. Hilda and Konrad were sitting together in a rockery overspread with greenness: this was their conversation:

"How lovely are the oranges!" said Hilda.

"Marvellous," answered Konrad.

"I think, Herr von Roden, this must be the most beautiful place in all the world."

"It certainly is the pleasantest to me," he said. "Just now," he added, watching her unconscious face. "This rockery," he continued ("How stupid she is"). The expected blush appeared upon her childish cheeks. She was very young and unformed; her figure was not graceful, but to call her hunchbacked was as preposterous as to call Dickie plain.

"Is that the postman," she said, "coming up between the agaves?"

"I believe so. How unkind of you to care about the postman! Letters from anywhere would be quite indifferent to me just now"—while he spoke, his anxious thoughts flew to Rheyna: the race was running; who would be in

first, Hymen or Death?—"But you, I am sure, have lots of people who love you."

"I have lots of people who have always been kind to me," she said. "People *are* kind: it seems to me. I can't think what makes aunt Bathildis, who is goodness itself, say the world is wicked. Uncle Franzl was always very good to me. Do you know his—his new wife? I don't like to ask my aunts about her."

"Yes; I have met her."

"Oh, tell me, is she very beautiful? Is she kind?"

"She is pretty enough in her way, white and pink, not the sort I should care for. Nobody could mistake her for a born Countess Kauenfels."

The two aunts nudged each other, looking over the parapet, beaming. But some one came on to the terrace and called them away.

"Is she kind?"

"Kind-hearted enough, jolly, you know. But not *good*." He bent forward. "Not good, like you."

A shriek arose from the terrace. Bathildis hung over the side with an open letter. She was waving it frantically. "Your uncle is dead!" she screamed. "Imagine! Your uncle is dead!"

Konrad sprang to his feet. His grey cheeks went green. The exclamation which burst from him was very like an oath. At that moment he realised it all: he would never be anything but plain Konrad von Roden. Well, at least, he need not be in such a hurry to marry—there were other girls as blue-blooded as Hilda, with as many thousand pounds.

"Yes, he is dead!" screamed Bathildis, crying and sobbing. "And has left all his money to 'Dickie'! Oh the wicked, the cruel, misguided poor dear!"

"Uncle—uncle——" stammered Hilda, dissolving in tears.

Konrad was running across the gravel. "Who is dead?" he gasped.

"My brother—Count Kauenfels!" replied the weeping Bathildis.

"And has left all his money to—'Dickie'!" chimed in Frederica.

For a moment Konrad stood thunderstruck; then he ran away, behind some laurel-bushes, and laughed and laughed—doubling up with silent merriment, an ugly sight to see.

He ran away straight to his hotel and packed his port-

manteau and hurried to the station. The compartment he got into was full of flies. He amused himself by catching these, pulling out their wings and setting them to crawl—a small regiment—upon the light-grey cushions. He did it so methodically, with so grave a countenance, you wondered why.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE evening lamps were lighted at Rheyna. A heavy silence lay about the lonely mansion, shrouded in solemn mists amid its leafless trees. Beyond, on every hand, spread endless wastes of flat black field and meadow, dead, dreary, desolate—not much more grey and gloomy, now that the darker night had chased the duller day. In the thicket, near the house, a screech-owl yelled at intervals—its hideous clangour deepened the all-pervading hush.

The grand drawing-room of the mansion is a hall of some sixty feet by thirty-five, and proportionately lofty: it is carved from top to bottom and richly gilt in the overloaded style of Frederick the Great. The Head of the House, in his palmy days, had always elected, when not alone (which he never was) to spend the long evenings in this vast apartment, the splendour of which somehow fittingly framed his parade-full personality. He had it illuminated at outrageous expense—but when did Count Rheyna heed selfish expenditure?—candles were the only light, besides old-fashioned oil-lamps, which he chose to admit in his house, though he never would have entered an hotel that had not the latest electric improvements. It was a good thing for his purse, that he preferred Berlin and Paris and half a dozen other resorts to his hollow palace in the marsh. He had always presented an admirable mixture of the prodigal hedonist and the practical manager. The cutest man of business would have found it a difficult task to cheat Count Rheyna of a pecuniary advantage, an impossible one to deprive him of the most superfluous luxury. The world, as he had seen it all his life, was not round, but shaped like a fan, with himself the pin.

His mental and physical ruin had left the one pillar of self-will erect, though swept by the winds of querulousness and silly caprice. He was always crying for something he could not possibly have. What could be given he refused

to cry for. Though long conscious of futile exertion, Egon strove to avoid any known cause for tears. The labour was that of a Danaïd.

Therefore, night after night, the little family sat in a corner of that enormous emptiness. If the lights were fewer than formerly, the old man would cry for "brushes." Several dozen words in daily usage had thus dislodged each other in his brain, had tumbled, so to speak, into wrong places, whence no human skill would ever again dislodge them. It was not by any means certain, for instance, though probable, that he would speak of brushes as "candles": in any case, if you misunderstood or corrected him, he cried. Schlumpgen had declared it inadvisable to contradict the patient: irritation might hasten the end.

So Egon, assisted by Hans, nursed the terrible invalid from morning to night and, no less assiduously, from night to morning. Dementia senilis demands unremittent supervision: there exists no such harrowing disease for those in attendance, at least in the earlier stages, ere dotage has brought repose. Count Roden-Rheyna had lost all direction of his limbs or his senses: he could just make such irregular and incoherent use of them as caused infinite labour and anxiety to those whose task it was to feed him like a, swearing, infant or clothe him like a, sentient, doll. His appetite was enormous: his meals formed his chief delectation, and, exercise now being out of the question, his old enemy, the gout, nipped and tweaked him till he yelled. Worse than his shrieks were the periods of silence, when he would sit for hours, unable to express himself, the tears coursing down his now sunken cheeks, his gaze fixed on the swellings in finger- or toe-joints.

Then Egon would endeavour to rouse him and get him to play with his toys. He tired of his tin soldiers, unable to arrange them in battle: his shaky touch upset them, and he wept when they fell. The one plaything that never disappointed him was a little common water-pump, a shilling thing that draws up the fluid and shoots it down again. At the handle of this he would work for hours, tranquilly happy, filling tiny twopenny pails. Its only disadvantage was that, of course, he messed the water all over him, and this necessitated changing his clothing, a fearful undertaking at any time, sufficiently dreaded by his faithful attendants at the beginning and the close of each

day. That the little pumps seldom survived more than an hour or two of unmitigated pump-work was a secondary consideration. On his birthday he demolished four of them: boxes of two dozen were sent from Berlin.

The stillness from outside, the muffled stillness of mist, had entered the house. In a corner of the brilliantly lighted apartment, by a table, sat the Lord of Rheyna, a white night-cap on his head—he often cried for it—a voluminous white dressing-gown about his shrunken frame. Egon sat beside him, cutting out paper dolls and blowing them across the inlaid tortoise-shell surface. Hans stood poking up the fire.

The old man laughed heartily, "Bindle!" he said. "Bindle! Bindle!" and clapped his hands.

"Hans!" demanded Egon, "do you know what he means by 'bindle'?"

"I've been thinking: I fancy it must be 'beautiful,'" answered the servant, standing to attention. "You know, he said the sausage was 'bindle' yesterday. Yes, I think it must mean 'beautiful,' sir."

A white doll went flying across the table, and the old man's laugh rang out.

"Your Excellency means 'beautiful'; is it not so?" questioned Hans.

His Excellency stared vacantly at the speaker, with bleary-eyed foolishness of gaze. It had always been an affectation of Count Rheyna that he could not recognise his own domestics: there was no room for affectation at present.

"Oh, it's no use asking *him*," exclaimed Egon. "Surely you might have learnt that by now."

A servant threw open the great double-doors of the drawing-room. "My lady!" he cried.

The little Generalin appeared on the threshold, in her heavy black mourning, with her porcelain face. Her manner betokened great trepidation: the son, looking up from his handiwork, saw it at once. He laid down the scissors.

"Egon, something terrible has happened!" she said.

"I must speak to you at once," she added, "alone." With a face full of murmurs the favoured retainer withdrew.

"What is it, mother?"

"Konrad has married Lady Archibald, the widow of the man whom he shot!"

There came no immediate answer. The Count struck his hand on the table, with angry screams, like a child, thrust aside.

"Goo-roo!" he repeated: they now knew this to be his profoundest expression of discontent. It was all that was audibly left of his favourite—his heaviest—oath.

To the old man's enragement his victim no longer heard him.

"Terrible indeed," said Egon at last.

Mother and son gazed into each others' eyes. "Oh, how can such things be!" cried the Generalin. It is the mother's despairing cry, to which none ever find an answer.

"Goo-roo! Goo-roo!" The old man screamed so loud, his nephew sat down again, and blew dolls across the table. "He needn't have been in such a hurry to marry," said Egon presently, looking up, with a side-glance towards his uncle. The old man sat sucking his middle-finger, his night-cap had fallen forward: the nephew pushed it up again.

"I thought he loved Hilda!" wailed the Generalin.

A smile stole over Egon's features, but he was not going to blacken Konrad before their mother. "He loved Dickie first," he said.

"That is true," responded Frau von Roden. "And, certainly, Dickie is much prettier than Hilda. I cannot well imagine a Roden married to a woman who is plain."

Egon gazed up at her, his eyes rippling over with swift laughter. And she, in the midst of their sadness, blushed and smiled like a girl. "Don't be silly, child," she expostulated. "Of course, I mean one of you younger people—I mean—"

"I know perfectly well what you mean," he answered, still teasing; he had come round and gathered her in his arms. "Vain little mother, you are absolutely right. I never knew a Roden with a wife who was not pretty."

"Stupid boy, leave me in peace!" She began to disengage herself: then suddenly, it was she threw her arms around his neck, hugging and kissing him, pressing him closer to her heart. "Egon, my own dear, splendid boy!" she said. "Oh, Egon, my son, my son!"

He trembled a little, throughout his stalwart figure: to her it seemed as if her own words recalled strange memories of sorrow, for, in the silence: "Would I had died for thee!" she whispered faintly. He bent in vain to catch the quivering words.

The old Count, in a paroxysm of fury—for nothing

enraged him like signs of affection between others—tried to raise himself and, catching at the rumpled table-cloth, upset a vase of flowers across his knees. The next moments, therefore, were occupied with him (as he desired), and Hans carried him off, weeping and sputtering, to bed.

"Let us go into my sitting-room," said Egon, "I have all the Saturday accounts to look over." He had taken upon him the whole management of the estates, inevitably, astonished to discover how punctilious his uncle, the man of pleasure, had been.

He established himself before his writing-table, with account-books and papers. The Generalin sat near him, bending over some light fancy-work. It was Justus who had said, years ago, that his wife's companionship combined the ripple of a brooklet with the cool repose of a well.

An hour later he gathered up his documents and locked them away.

"Now," she said, "let me speak, Egon. Why did he do this thing?"

"Why should he not? We long knew him to be fond of her."

"Egon, she was a barmaid—a beer girl."

"No, no—she is the widowed Countess von Kauenfels."

"Egon, her husband has not been dead a month!"

"And he left her all his money," said Egon.

"But—but a woman cannot re-marry, surely, within so brief a space?"

This time the answer did not come so pat. "Not here in Germany, certainly, nor, for instance, in France, but in Switzerland I suppose she can. She did not mourn so very long for her first husband."

"They were married in England. They seem to have gone there together."

"In England the formalities are simple: I believe almost any marriage is legal over there. Won't you show me his letter, mother?"

"This is the English advertisement," she held out a newspaper-cutting. "He has published it only, he says, in the *Times*."

Egon read: "On the 17th inst. at the Church of the Holy Innocents, Southwark, by the Rev. Armytage Hopkins, B.A., Konrad, second son of the late General von Roden, of Bonn, Germany, to Elizabeth, Countess von Kauenfels-Courmayeur."

"Dickie sticks to her Courmayeur," he said. "Won't you show me his letter?"

"No," she replied.

Egon smiled his quick smile, the new, grave smile she had got to know of late, but did not like to see. "Does he speak so very unkindly of me?" he said. "Never mind, dear: he has done it before."

"He wishes to come here," replied the mother. "At Easter, when the others come, he intends to present her as his wife."

"He is clever," said Egon thoughtfully. "He knows we cannot well refuse that. Yes, they must come, mother. We must make the best of a bad job."

She had risen. She said abruptly:

"Egon, do you know—or do you not know?—Sometimes, I think you do not know—yet, of course, you must—that, unless Dorothea returns to you, when your uncle dies, your chance of inheriting is lost."

He looked up at her quickly, coloured. "I know," he said quietly.

"You know—yet you never spoke of it. You know that the entail demands that there be no separation, legal or—or—what is the expression?"

"De facto," he said.

"Between husband and wife, or else the husband shall not count as married. It is a foolish stipulation."

"Nay, mother, it is a very shrewd one, two hundred years old. It prevents simulated marriages, as well as attempting to exclude unworthy successors."

"And it makes the Kellnerin Lies'l Countess of Rheyna!" she cried.

"That also would be impossible," he answered, with drawn face. "But Konrad has married the Countess of Kauenfels. He has been wonderfully fortunate. There is a special angel watches over Konrad."

"She is Lies'l, the barmaid Lies'l," cried the Generalin.

"She is twice ennobled by her marriages, and he can prove it," said Egon decidedly. "I have studied the *Hausgesetz*, mother. And Konrad, I don't doubt, has studied it better than I."

"Then why is he so anxious about you being here if he knows that you can't succeed?"

"Ah!" said Egon quickly. "Does he write that he was afraid I should kill uncle Karl? Don't betray him, little

mother. Anyhow, he never imagines for a moment that Dorothea would not return, on the chance of becoming Countess Rheyna. He cannot believe in such a possibility, nor can Dickie. See! he would have married Hilda rather than forego the chance of the succession himself."

"You know all this," said the Generalin, miserably, "and yet you do nothing."

"My God! what can I do?" He had started up. She cowered before the expression of his face. She rose gently on tiptoe, and kissed him and went away.

Next morning she told him that she was going to Bonn for a day or two. He thought that she was anxious to see her daughter, who had spent the last couple of months with some cousins, pending definite arrangements about the fate of uncle Karl. The old man's condition made it impossible for a young girl to come near him. Gertrude, unable to understand this, complained of enforced selfishness, while lightening the daily burdens of a delicate relative with half a dozen overpowering children. The Fräulein von Roden was one of those members in a family whose presence you take for granted and whose absence you bemoan. It was difficult to think of her: she never thought of herself. She was a background, warm against the east wind, cool to summer heat. But no one knew it. People found her unattractive. A strange girl, who studied mathematics. Officers who danced with her asked if she'd squared the circle. And when she gained the great Berlin Gold Medal with her new demonstration of the minus in the formula $a^2 - 2ab + b^2$ (could anything be simpler?—the egg of Columbus), the whole University roared with laughter and scorn.

The Generalin, however, left Gertrude to her studies and the care of her cousin's children. Due west the old lady travelled into a foreign country she never had visited before—a country whose unaccustomed quaintness, a thousand strange whims of speech, costume and scenery struck cold at that moment on a heart in great need of familiar sympathy. The nature of the Generalin was one made for large, honest joys and sorrows, but not for strife, envy and corruption. Konrad's ways were beyond its comprehension. Great evil the widow of Justus could understand, but not petty intrigue. And while an immense desolation, such as had befallen her eldest and the woman who loved him, appealed to her every impulse of grief, love

and hope, the entanglements growing up about the Roden succession aroused little but loathing in her simple soul. Was this a moment to negotiate about titles and title-deeds? She felt as if Eve, pausing on the threshold of Paradise, had demanded to depart in a brougham of her own.

There was no brougham of any kind, private or otherwise, at the little country town near Brodryck. Madame de Roden sat over a miserable dinner in the sanded coffee-room and deliberated what to do next.

Her cogitations were disturbed by the entrance of uncle Tony. He had been out all day, on Dorothea's account—a sale of timber ten miles from the Manor House.

"Tim," he called, "bring me a glass of—God bless my soul!—punch—it can't be Madame de Roden!"

"But it is!" said the Generalin, very nearly beginning to cry.

"God bless my—hot!" said uncle Tony. "And—and—" he added, "Might I ask—is——?"

"No!" replied the lady, "I am alone."

Uncle Tony inquired no further. He sat down by the table and contemplated his muddy boots, the little lady's travel-stained appearance, the nuts and biscuits of her pitiful dessert.

"A poor dinner, I suppose," he said.

"I really don't know," she answered.

Uncle Tony stared. He believed himself to be an emotional, tender-hearted old gentleman, but till the hour of his death he would be aware if his dinner had been good or bad.

"Cheer up!" he said suddenly. Thereupon the Généralin began to weep at once in a quiet way, with few tears, that soon stopped, to Tony's immense relief. "Might I ask your plans?" he ventured timidly.

"I have none: I want to see Dorothea," she replied.

"You know that she is with her father and—his wife at the Manor House?"

"Yes: is she happy?" The Generalin bent forward with anxious eyes.

"What would you do if I said yes?"

"Thank God," said the Generalin.

"And believe me?"

"No!"

"She is not happy."

"Thank God!" said the Generalin, "for Egon's sake."

"Would you be happy," asked uncle Tony, "if you lived with the Baroness de Fleuryse and she advised you to make it up with your husband?"

"I do not know the lady. But I should never have allowed any one to come between my husband and me."

"Then why do you want to speak to Dorothea?" exclaimed uncle Tony. He blushed very red. "I beg you a thousand pardons," he said. "Consider, pray, that I made a remark about the weather."

"I could not answer your question, if I would. I want to see Dorothea," replied the little Generalin.

"You can see her immediately if you choose—within ten minutes!"

The Generalin fell to trembling, nervously. "Brodryck is some distance from here: is she not at Brodryck? Where can I see her?"

"At the theatre."

"You are laughing at me!" The little lady sat there in her dust-stained mourning against the whitewash of the common room, under the glare of the paraffin lamp. Her thoughts flew away to the big hall at Rheyna, and Egon at his table by the old man's chair, with the candles all around, in the silence and the mist.

"At the theatre!"

"Am I the sort of man," spluttered Tony indignantly, "who laughs at a woman like you? Yes, she is at the theatre in this little town: I will tell you why. They have a troupe here once a week from Amsterdam: the Colonel, who bores himself to death, went regularly with Mrs. Sandring. The last week or two the wife has had a cold, a bad throat, and so Dorothea has gone with her father. Neither of the aunts would as much as approach a theatre: what remains? Colonel Sandring refused to go alone."

The Generalin had risen. "It is by far the best," she said. "I will see her here: I dread going to Brodryck and meeting those people"—especially she dreaded aunt Mary. "Take me to her." Uncle Tony sent for a fly.

"Why does Colonel Sandring remain then?" queried Madame de Roden.

Uncle Tony, who had called for a second glass of punch, hot, with an extra slice of lemon in it, winked: "His Baroness has religious misgivings," he said. "She gets a lot

of comfort from Dorothea. (Also, the system hasn't worked at Monte Carlo, and next year's income is spent. Also, I am a chatterer, Madame de Roden.")

"I used to think," said Madame de Roden, "the world was much simpler before Justus died."

Uncle Tony slapped his breeches pocket. "But the money's safe, madame," he continued. "Dorothea's money's safe. There is even more of it. You can tell your son that I told you so."

"I shall do no such thing," replied the Generalin indignantly. She got into the fly, and it rumbled up a street or two towards the theatre. "I must speak to her alone," she said, as they stopped before the dimly-lighted entrance. I suppose she has a box? I would much rather talk to her in a public place like this, but I do not want others to overhear us."

"But—I had intended to ask her to come into this cab."

"No! oh no!—not like that! Not for the world!" cried the Generalin in a flurry. "Come with me—like this. It could not be better—come!" She hurried out, up the narrow staircase, to the boxes. "Give me her cloak," said the Generalin, "that white one—I recognise it!" In another moment the bewildered Tony had opened a box door: a sudden burst of sound—French actors talking and laughing—the turning of various faces—the half-dark of the poor little theatre against the brightness of the stage—Madame de Roden stood framed in the entry.

She had been impelled forward, in her sudden, irresistible longing to delay no longer, to see Dorothea, to speak to her. The tension of her nerves was too great: she could not wait. And now she saw that fortune favoured her; the box was a deep one, on the stage, with a screen.

"I am come to speak with you," she said softly, in German (she had conversed in French with uncle Tony). "Only for a moment. You are not a woman to faint or scream. Nothing has happened. I only want to speak with you for a moment: then I will go away again. Back to Rheyna—to him." Tony had dragged the amazed Colonel away: the Colonel protested; he wanted to see what was going to happen. Madame de Roden, by Jove? But he also wanted to follow the evolution of the naughty husband's discomfiture on the stage; he allowed himself to be led downstairs to the stalls.

Dorothea sat well at the back of the box—she had

stipulated for one of these half-hidden corners—clothed in white from head to foot, for the only other shades she would wear, grey and black, her father had, almost tearfully, entreated her to abandon. Clothed in white, then, from head to foot, with no jewels but Egon's bridal necklace about her throat. It was the first thing the Generalin saw, even sooner than the face of the wearer. Her heart leaped within her. As the face turned, the light fell on it, white and still; the mother thought she had never seen her son's wife look so peerlessly beautiful. A shout of laughter went up from the pit, for the injured woman on the stage had slapped her middle-aged husband's respectable face. The two at the back of the box spoke under cover of these rushes of merriment.

"I will teach thee to run about the streets!" screamed the wife on the stage.

"Dorothea, I have come, I hardly know how. I do not know what I can do. I know what I would desire, but how can I do it? How? How? Oh, Dorothea!" The forlorn widow, in her mourning, with the white fur partly shielding it, hung, gasping, in the shade, against the door. "I have nothing to say for him, nothing. I cannot excuse him. He does not know I am here. I dare not ask you to forgive him. Only, I could stay away no longer. I am here!"

"I will avenge myself: I also still have charms!" screamed the actress, amid yells of approval from the pit.

Dorothea, with pain all about her eyebrows, had turned from the scene behind the footlights. Three times in the last month she had accompanied her insistent father to these performances. They were always the same; the immense joke of adultery, the fun of seeing others found out. Was it wrong to go? The spectacle seemed so odious to her, she fancied such self-sacrifice must be meritorious. And the Baroness had entreated her with earnest entreaty. "Had you accompanied Egon to that sort of thing, he would never—well, well, my dear, go with your father. 'Tis the only way of keeping 'em straight."

"I am come, yes, I am come," sobbed the Generalin. "Perhaps I should have stayed away. You do not see him, as I do, yonder at Rheyna with his uncle. Oh, Dorothea, can you not forgive him?"

Then Dorothea spoke. "Forgive him?" she said in clearest accents, quite low, beneath the tumult on the

boards. "I have forgiven him long ago. I love him. But surely, in God's sight our marriage is at end."

"Ah, *chenapan*!" screamed the wife of the comedy.

"Would you have me return to him? Would you have us live in wedlock?" continued Dorothea. "You, who know that God's word bids us separate? My father's wife does not understand, but you—you know that the Lord whom we serve, Christ Himself, has commanded me to put him away." Her voice trembled. "That reason—it is the only one—dissolves marriage, ends it. The only one except death. Ah, death were a thousand times better. Christ——" She dashed her hands across her eyes. A shout went up from the body of the building. Three incongruous couples were careering about the stage and singing at the top of their voices:

"Marriage is a nuisance.

Bear the bond as best you can,
And teach your wife a due sense
Of liberty, that right of man."

"This!" said Dorothea, with a movement of her hand, "would you have us fall to *this*?"

"I would have nothing," murmured the Generalin.
"Only—only——"

"What?" questioned Dorothea gently.

"I do not know."

"Nor I. There is nothing left. He has ended it: it is over. Do not fear, I have kept his secret. At present, he is with his sick uncle; I am here for a little; that is natural enough. Afterwards, we must think of something." She put her hand to her forehead. "Perhaps one of us will die. No, that is not likely, it must be my—what do they call it?—my incompatibility of temper. And thus we can live for fifty years." Her voice failed her altogether; she drew towards her mother-in-law, and the two women mingled their tears. The screaming and laughter continued on the stage. "If I went back to him, it is I—I," gasped Dorothea, "I who would be the—the—would be living in—no, I cannot;—oh, do not tempt me!" said Dorothea. The curtain sank down on the act, the lights went up. The Generalin started aside. "I will sleep at the inn here to-night and go back again to-morrow," she said.

"Will you not come with us?"

"No. You are aware that Konrad has married Dickie?"

"My father told me."

"She is the future Countess of Roden-Rheyna. There are pecuniary considerations—but of these I refuse to speak to you. I feel I have no right to intrude them on your sorrow. And yet, Dorothea, if some day——"

The little door of the box was opened: Colonel Sandring had come in. He stared curiously from one woman to the other, but, before he could say anything, the Generalin had passed him, and was hastening down the corridor, much remarked, in her black attire, by the loungers of the "*entr'acte*." Uncle Tony, no less noticeable in his brown velveteens, pushed towards the front. "Permit me," he said, "to escort you to your carriage."

The little Generalin travelled back to Rheyna; she told Egon that Gertrude was well and happy. "As people are who do their duty—or ought to be," she added, with a side glance at her son.

"Yes," he answered. If she had her secrets, so had he. It would hardly have been practicable to tell her of a letter which had reached him while she was away.

"I absolve you from your promise," Signor Pini had written. "I absolve you: go, do what you like! Since the day when I bound you, the luck has gone against me. I lose in spite of the mathematical impossibility; with the system I lose daily. The Devil is angry with me; he ruins me. It is evil fighting for Valentine—against Faust!" The colour mounted high on Egon's cheeks, and, as he slowly tore up the letter, there settled that look upon his face of which the people who knew him best were most afraid.

CHAPTER XX.

"SPEAK to me. Tell me. Let me know," writes Dorothea. "Perhaps it is better you were not here when I came back, Mark. I am sorry enough for the reason, but you write that you are nearly restored to health, and that rejoices us all. You must remain at Wiesbaden till May or June, and come back quite well. Yes, I think it is better you were not here. I could not have spoken. Till now, I have felt I could not even write. There are things a woman dares not utter: you will understand. Aunt Mary gave me your message. 'Tell Dorothea I dare not write, but I dare pray for her.' That is all I dared do, to pray. But now I am writing to you, Mark. I shall send the letter at once, before I have time to re-read it and tear it up. Mrs. Sandring talks to me, and so does my father—even uncle Tony, so you see, there is little sacredness left. I am writing, writing gladly—my hand trembles, but you will be able to read. See, this question troubles me from morning to night; I cannot let it rest. Surely Christ has taught us, that one thing only, except death, ends marriage. There is no marriage after that. All other faults and mistakes and crimes leave man and woman husband and wife, and if they separate, it is wickedness. But one sin breaks, dissolves their union. There is no more marriage: they who marry these severed ones commit no fault. Surely the teaching is plain, plain? Help me to tell them so here. Yet I hardly dare tell them: I do not know what to say, and I beg them to leave me in peace. Aunt Mary agrees with me: to her only can I open my heart, but she says it is woman's unchanging fate to bear the burden of man's wrong-doing. Aunt Emma says it too, but so differently, without the eternal light on it, as you will understand. And Mrs. Sandring—but I cannot tell you what Mrs. Sandring says. I am pouring out my heart to you, at last, after all these weeks—do not answer half my letter. But you are a theologian: you have studied theology.

Help me to feel Christ's teaching: to explain it to myself. It seems so right, so evident, so simple. Why do others push it aside and talk about expediency? The hour is twelve o'clock at night. I am going to slip down to the post office and put this letter in myself."

Thus wrote Dorothea, a week or two after her meeting with Egon's mother. She closed the envelope hastily and slipped down into the mild spring night. The great house was asleep; she went out by a terrace-window. She had never been afraid of thieves. Never exactly "afraid" of anything, but dirt and cruelty.

It was pitch-dark, but she knew every inch of the road. She cut across the park and down the avenue.

"Who goes there?" cried a very loud voice, and two dogs ran sniffing about Dorothea's feet.

"It is I, uncle Tony, going to post a letter."

What a flight uncle Tony's fancy took! "A letter! At this time of night! Let me see the address." He struck a match.

"It is only a letter to Mark," she laughed, always unable to dissemble.

"Blow Mark," said the disappointed uncle Tony, and extinguished the match. "All the same, it must be an important letter," he added. "Dorothea, there is no earthly good in your writing to Mark." He tucked her arm under his and began walking leisurely towards the house. "I will post your letter," he said.

She did not answer, but allowed him to lead her, wondering, meanwhile, whether she should give him the letter or tear it up and cast it to the winds.

"Dorothea," he began presently, puffing heavily at his cigar, "I am glad we have met here like this: it is Fortune's doing. There are one or two things I am burning to say to you I should never have had courage to speak about by daylight. Don't stop me for Heaven's sake. Do you remember our walking up this avenue on the morning of your birthday, just before your father's summons came, fifty years ago? We were young then, both of us, and now we are old. Do you remember that you asked me if the world was wicked, and I answered no? You and I have learnt a thing or two since then, Dorothea. Were you to ask me now, I should answer, yes. The world is very wicked at its best: we must take it as we find it, Dorothea."

She walked slowly on. "The sort of thing one—loathes," she quoted musingly.

Uncle Tony stopped and struck his stick upon the ground. "A counsel of perfection: do you know what that means?" he said. "I tell you, child, there is no greater mischief in all this wicked world than a counsel of perfection to a poor weak human sinner, from a saint."

"What do you mean?"

"Ah, there I have you. You don't even know what I mean. Poor Egon. He is the weak human sinner, and you are the saint."

"Uncle Tony, I entreat of you to spare me. Let us walk back in silence: let me post my letter."

"My dear, I should certainly obey you if there were a moon. But in this pitch-dark I venture to continue and say: have you ever realised to what a life of guilt your action is condemning your husband?"

"He is not my husband."

"Do you expect him to live as your married widower for ever and aye?"

Dorothea called to the dogs. Uncle Tony blew his nose.

"You attach so much importance to the Bible. The Bible says that woman shouldn't leave a man to himself."

"You do not know, uncle Tony, nor do you care, what the Bible commands on the subject of marriage."

"I not know? I not care?" spluttered uncle Tony. "My dear, I know very well, as I will prove to you very soon. I—well, Dorothea, I have had my say. Give me the letter: I would rather go away now. God bless you. Good-night."

Uncle Tony trudged hastily homewards. His faithful Rebecca opened the door, coughing. "How late you are, sir," she said severely. Since her trip to the Riviera she ruled her master with whips of scorpions. The obligation under which she had laid him by exposing herself for his sake to Popery and earthquakes she now hung as a mill-stone round his neck.

"You've got the whole Bible in your head, have you not?" said uncle Tony, drawing off his coat.

"In my heart," replied Rebecca.

"That's no use. What I want to know is where that bit comes in about—oh, blow it: I can't ask, Rebecca. I've got one somewhere, but I couldn't lay my hand on it. Look here, Rebecca, you've got one, eh?"

"A what, sir?"

"A Bible, hang it. Get me your Bible: bring it up into my bedroom with my punch." Rebecca obeyed with alacrity, convinced that her master had at last bowed to her (so-called silent) influence, and would soon join her own little special Calvinist conventicle of groans.

Uncle Tony established himself in his great green four-poster, his purple face under its night-cap, straining, spectacled, over the maid's small "Bible with Psalms." The steaming tumbler stood beside him, and, when his feelings got too much for him, he took a comforting pull at its contents.

"You will find a great deal of consolation expressly pointed out," Rebecca had said in departing, whereby she meant, as he very soon discovered, that the loudest Lamentations of Jeremiah had been heavily underscored. But the writer uncle Tony knew he wanted was St. Paul. He had to begin at the first of Romans: in his ignorance there was no other way. The grog had come to an end long before he found what he sought, in Corinthians. Then he laid himself down to sleep with a sigh of content. Next morning he wrote a few figures of texts on a piece of paper and sent them to the Manor House, and ran away for the whole day, as far as Amsterdam.

To this hour Rebecca does not understand.

But Mrs. Sandring had been beforehand, and a good deal directer than uncle Tony. With people who see each other constantly, congruity of thought is often in the air. The Scripture reading that morning had only been of Eleazar's going to seek a wife for Isaac, but when it was over, and the servants had filed out, Mrs. Sandring had spoken suddenly, brutally:

"Either go back to him, or divorce him. Else you are wickeder than he."

Divorce!

Dorothea had risen from the table, and fled. The new word had struck her in the heart.

Of course the thought had always been with her, unuttered, unrealised. Spoken aloud, and by another, it looked so different. True, there was divorce. Legal formalities innumerable. She must divorce him. He had a right to demand it. How different was God's law from man's legality!

She *could* not divorce him. He must ask it, if he chose. She would not resist. But to take these steps—hideous,

horrible, the profanation of a woman's heart—no, she could not.

Almost immediately came Lester's answer,—in Holy Week, on the verge of Easter.

"Will you care for my theology, Dorothea? To me it seems Christ gave the permission to separate but not the command. Greater than all law, with Him, is surely the mercy which conquers law; greatest of all things is love. 'Let him that is guiltless among you cast the first stone.' Did the One who was guiltless among them cast it? Yours is the privilege of guiltlessness in a world that understands only the language of evil. 'Neither do I condemn thee. Sin no more.' Surely, surely, Dorothea, He sent back this sinful wife to her *husband*."

That was all. Not a word more except:

"I am always your very affectionate MARK."

"He has answered me," said Dorothea aloud. She stood, with the letter in her hand, before her mother's portrait, in its new place, on the wall of the bedroom at the Manor House. She stood gazing at the sad face of the woman who had died so young. All the varied influences of the last days came rushing in upon her. And a glad light of love and hope overflowed into her eyes.

"I will go back to him," she said softly. "Neither do I condemn thee. Come, let us sin no more."

She stooped forward and kissed the lips of the mother to whom a husband's evil-doing had brought death.

"I will go back to-day," she said.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN that same Holy Week, preceding Easter, with the promise of new life awakening across the black gloom of the Altmark, while the gaunt trees were breaking into greenness, and the gaudy parterres of the old-fashioned gardens were ablaze with tulips and hyacinths—in that same week of April, preceding Easter, the Rodens gathered for the festival at Rheyna. During those few days, the Head of the Family, protesting, but without exactly knowing against what, was confined to his suite of rooms on the first story. Hans watched over him, and Egon would hurry back, almost gladly, to the room where the old man sat pumping, from the scream of Dickie's laughter downstairs. Such a room! The gilt woodwork like a tangle of orchids, from designs by Meissonier.

Shortly after her return the Generalin had said boldly to Egon: "I have been to Dorothea. I have seen her." She had followed him into his bedroom. He had just lighted a candle. Before she knew what he was doing, he had blown it out.

"Well?" he said in a muffled voice.

"Egon, she will come back to you, for she loves you still."

She waited a moment in the darkness, but he did not reply.

"I know nothing but that," she continued, "I cannot argue; everything is wrong. I cannot say when she will return, or how. She has a right to remain away. Yes, all that she says is true. But she will come back to you in the end, for she loves you better than ever."

"God bless her," he said.

"And that is why life is still beautiful, as your father would have said, were he here—because we love one another. Because in this wicked, miserable world, love takes our follies and sorrows and weaves them into cords about our hearts. Because we love one another. In the end that is all. There is nothing more, nothing less. She will return."

"God grant it," he whispered. He walked up and down the room, with firm step, for a long time after his mother had left him. His thoughts were of many things; of this daily drudgery on the vast estates, a labour which he chose to think "useless"—"for any one could do it"—of the glory that might have been his in the fight against savages and fever in the Colonies; of Pini—his cheeks mantled—who had shamefully insulted him—if there was a man in this world whom Egon Roden hated, it was Pini.

Next morning came Karl, the young cadet, with two comrades, of no further importance in this story. Gertrude also arrived a little later, bringing a couple of her sick cousin's superfluous children, girls. The house was full of voices and merriment. The old gentleman, in his white clothing, hung over the gilt banisters, gurgling, grinning, looking down.

On the Wednesday appeared she who was at this moment the centre of interest—the Bride!

The bride whose honeymoon had changed partner half-way. Dickie was supremely happy. "I married the first time for the sake of being married," she said to Konrad, "the second for the sake of being Countess, and the third for the pleasure of being your wife." Konrad did not care to hear this addition. "And I don't see why I should marry for the fourth time," she said simply. "I don't intend," replied Konrad, "to give you a chance."

As soon as she found herself tied down to Kauenfels she had hurried him off to Paris and lived there in an orgasm of Boulevard delights. It must be admitted that he was as youthful and eager as she. They enjoyed themselves outrageously, and Dickie danced at the Moulin Rouge. Thereby she realised the chief dream of her girlhood. She danced amid a good deal of admiration, not so much of her dancing, perhaps, as of other charms. And while she danced she sang softly to herself, all the time: "I'm a Countess, a Countess." Her princely old husband, who had had too much wine, stood in bleary admiration, clapping his hands. "I'm good for twenty years yet," he declared the day before his end. "Dead? Of course," said Barbolat.

Konrad, hastening to Paris from Monte Carlo, found the widowed Reichsgräfin von Kauenfels-Courmayeur in a large first-floor sitting-room of the Continental Hotel. Her maid had met him, with a grin, at the top of the staircase. "Oh, certainly, you can go in!" said Aurélie Bompard.

On a billowy yellow settee reclined Dickie, in white laces from bosom to foot. Quantities of flowers were all over the apartment: great masses of crimson and pink. A small monkey was nibbling biscuits in the middle of the carpet. At the farther end a group of Neapolitan musicians, in costume, were tinkling "Maria Nina," "Ella mi fa morir!"

Konrad stopped horror-struck:

"My dear Dickie, the conventionalities!"

She started up, angry. "What nonsense!—the conventionalities! I'm a Countess with twenty thousand a year."

"For that very reason, I was thinking——"

Dickie pouted. "They fetched him away this morning, and, really, I wanted a change."

"Konrad," she added, "don't be disagreeable, or what did you come for? I shall have to go after him to-night, I suppose, to that horrible place in the mountains. And put on a lot of odious black again, and black doesn't suit me. But certainly nobody makes like they do in Paris. You couldn't have a better place to order mourning in."

"You have been ordering?"

"Of course; what else would be the use of—I mean, Aurélie is certainly a treasure. What a stupid Dorothea was to let her go. When the doctor said that poor old Franz had departed, I sat up in my bed and I cried rivers. Aurélie put her head through the door and said: 'La coupeuse de chez Doucet.'"

"And you were comforted?"

"Konrad, you are very unamiable. But, of course, it made a diversion to look at all her patterns. And she certainly had the loveliest things."

The musicians stood touching up their instruments. The monkey demanded more biscuits with its well-known plaintive little note.

"I hate wearing black, anyhow. There are lots of reasons why I am sorry that Franzl died."

"But have you arranged everything? I had hoped I might prove useful."

"Of course I have arranged. As soon as I stopped crying, and my eyes weren't so red, I sent round to the Embassy. They sent back a young gentleman at once, with black moustaches: he was exceedingly polite. He said: 'Do not weep any more, Frau Gräfin,' so I didn't. He saw to it all. I thought it was very nice of the Ambassador—whatever he is—to send me a dark man."

"Why?" demanded the umbrageous Konrad.

"It seemed more fit."

"Oh!—and now the—the corpse has gone to Kauenfels?"

"Don't talk of him like that or I shall slap you. You are behaving badly, Konrad: you have 'missed your entrance,' as the French say. Sit down and listen to these people. The little one with the blue eyes has a delicious voice."

Konrad obeyed, and had to endure "Santa Lucia."

"All the same," he at last said desperately, "how about to-night?"

"She roused herself, her mouth full of bon-bons. "Konrad, how disagreeable you are! To-night! Do you know, I don't think I shall go to that funeral."

"But you must put in an appearance at Kauenfels!"

"Why should I? I hate funerals, I never went near one in my life. His servant has gone with the—train. Surely they can lock away poor Franzl without my help."

"Only——"

She began to cry. "I will send for my young gentleman from the Embassy," she sobbed. "He was always so obliging, and he said I could do as I liked."

"So you shall. You needn't send for that idiot of an attaché."

"Really? Konrad, I had no idea you could be so exactly like Egon."

"Thank you! That is a compliment, indeed. I'll do anything you like, Dickie, rather than hear you say that again."

So it was arranged, and the following telegram went to Castle Kauenfels:

"Immediate!"—for abroad you can send "immediate" telegrams, that pass before all others, at treble the price.

"Impossible to undertake the journey. Am completely prostrated by sorrowful event."

"ELIZABETH, VERWITTE WETE REICHSGRÄFIN KAUFENFELS."

But Dickie, when she re-read this sad message at her leisure, was very angry with Konrad, and flew out at him. For a second dispatch had to be flashed after the first.

"Do not postpone funeral."

When all this was settled, and she had dismissed the

Italian singers and the monkey-man, she said, with her fingers feeling for the hairpins in her cloud of fair hair: "Now—how shall we spend the evening?" And she sent for the *Figaro* to look down its list.

"I expect my black man at ten to take me to the station," she said. "I shall write him a note. You can do it: I make such mistakes in spelling. He must dine with us, and then we can have a *baignoire*, where nobody will see us, at something cheerful."

"I do not see the necessity of asking him," sulked Konrad. But she turned on him in splendid indignation. "The conventionalities!" she said slowly, and walked with great state from the room.

It is generally known, of course, that she did not attend her husband's funeral. But that her behaviour at the time was most admirable is avouched by her maid, and by Kauenfels' faithful serving-man. She tipped the latter very heavily—in fact she bought him a café. Dickie was always prodigal of money, eager to have it and willing to spend. And as for her maid: "The worse she behaves the better I like it," says Aurélie. "If I continue with her two years longer I shall, without compunction, have stolen myself rich."

It is not generally known that the widowed Countess went that evening, with her two attendants, to "La Tante de Charley." The piece is undoubtedly funny: she laughed till she cried.

When, a couple of months later at the utmost—no, it cannot have been so much: six weeks later—she married Konrad von Roden, in London, she filled up, for the moment, of course, the world's measure of disapproval and scorn. But nobody nowadays, with twenty thousand a year and such rank, need be lengthily afraid of either. From a Court point of view she was certainly "impossible," but that she would have been in any case, with her antecedents, and neither she nor Konrad cared for such things at present, knowing well that, when tired of enjoyment, they could set themselves resolutely to satisfy ambition. The Court of Berlin is not what it was twenty years ago: only Russia and Austria—and, by-the-bye, poor proud little pauper Sweden—still realise that money can smell bad. All the same, Dickie Roden fully appreciated the immense desirability of becoming Countess of Rheyna.

"I am not at all sure that I want to give up my title,"

she told Konrad, when he begged her to make him, immediately, the happiest of men.

His dusky face grew darker. "You shall be Countess Rheyna," he answered, "if human skill can do it."

"Can't I keep the other as well?"

"Not if you marry me. But Rheyna is better than Kauenfels, and you will more than double your income."

"All the same, the title is a bird in the bush."

"Dickie, marry me. We shall have a good time, together—and a big time, afterwards, as well."

"I should like to marry you, Konrad. But tell me about the entail."

He sat down beside her. "It must be decided," he said, "within twenty-four hours of my uncle's death. The candidates—that is to say, relatives in the same degree, who are married (the idea being to exclude children), draw lots."

"Egon, therefore, and you—if married."

"Exactly, but Egon must be reconciled to Dorothea first. As, of course, he would be, immediately. For husbands who are divorced or separated from their wives lose their chance."

"Who decides these matters?" asked Dickie with sudden interest.

"The 'Landrath' comes to represent the authorities, I believe, and a couple of other functionaries—of course I have never seen it."

"Then," said Dickie, "if you can get Egon and Dorothea to divorce, or to separate, your succession is secure. Surely your uncle will not live until the Child can marry?"

"Just so. Take me, Dickie. By Jove, I've never seen a woman I should like so well for my wife."

"It ought not to be difficult," said Dickie musingly, "with people so constituted as those two. What fools they are. Konrad, I'll risk it. I really like you better than any one I ever met."

So they ran across to London. "It's the only place in all the world," said Konrad. "You walk into a church and you walk out again, and you're married and no questions asked."

From London Dickie wrote to the Generalin, and at Easter Konrad brought his wealthy bride to Rheyna. "Whew!" she said, as she drove up to the Grand Entrance. "Konrad, I wonder, is Kauenfels still finer than this?"

"Of course not: it couldn't be," he answered angrily. He was proud of his ancestral home, and eager to possess it. He felt, also, that he would be the worthier owner, not a duffer like Egon.

She grinned, and told him that, when they had had enough of this place, they would go to the other and see. "And if we get this, and don't like the other," she added, "we will let the old ladies live at Kauenfels. Franzl was a brute to leave nothing to Hilda: what brutes you men are! But you know the condition in the will; don't you? If ever I have a son, he must take the name of Kauenfels."

"Of course I know; you have told me a dozen times," he said crossly. In spite of their passion for each other, they quarrelled all day long.

But Dickie was happy from morning till night. The cadets sank instantly at her feet, with calf-like admiration. Only loyal Karl held out, and told them they were fools. "I have always been happy," says Dickie, "ever since I was a baby. Nothing has ever happened to make me unhappy, not for more than half a minute. Only Archie bored me with his 'pons.'"

When she came down to dinner—in exquisite heliotrope, for she insisted on wearing what she chose to consider a sort of light mourning—she looked round the little gathering in apparent surprise. "Dear me!" she said, "what a pleasant party. I had no idea you admitted guests." She asked the Generalin and Gertrude to admire her toilette. "I had to throw away three hundred pounds' worth of clothes I had bought in Paris," she said calmly. "I have had four outfits in succession: I am sure Aurélie cannot regret Dorothea. But I persisted in wearing light mourning for a little. Konrad is so unseemly. I told him that I know what's what."

"Yes," said the Generalin gently. Gertrude looked across at her mother. It was only one little word, and, fortunately, Dickie was quite incapable of reading its meaning.

But she had a general feeling of discomfort, and such feelings always rendered her ferocious. She turned upon Egon, as soon as he came in from the smoking-room.

"You are master here at present, are you not?" she said.

"If there is anything I can do to make you comfortable, you have only to give your orders," he replied.

"The footman who came to the station dropped my dressing-case and smashed things. I hope you will dismiss him."

"I am sorry: I will tell him to be more careful in future."

"But I want you to send him away."

"I don't think this is quite the moment to turn off my uncle's servants," he answered, annoyed.

"Is it not? Let me tell you that the hotel proprietor at Geneva sent away a waiter who had winked at me. I was sure he had winked at me, though Kauenfels said not."

"Private families are so different from public places of amusement," put in the Generalin.

"Ah, you say that because I was a barmaid!" cried Dickie. "Well, nobody ever turned *me* off. I was a very good barmaid, I assure you. I doubled the custom, they said, at my first place. I doubt whether Gertrude could have managed that."

"It is a mathematical computation," said Gertrude, laughing. Dickie approved of this good-natured answer, and patted her sister-in-law's hand.

But, when Egon, anxious to amuse the young ones, had set them dancing, and approached her with the cheerful suggestion of a polka, she drew back annoyed.

"Come," he said, "I haven't danced since I was a schoolboy. We will telegraph to Barbolat."

"You forget," she replied, much ruffled, and looked down at her heliotrope train.

That evening she confided to Konrad that she detested Egon. She had retired to her room in most manifest sulks. The little Generalin, who had a genius for dance music, was rattling away by the hour, in the music room, and Egon was delighting the hearts of the cousin's daughters by his more or less clumsy attempts to dance half as well as they.

"Well, yes, of course," replied Konrad. "Still, at present, he's behaving quite decently. He can't send away old servants, that's bosh."

"And why not, pray? Kauenfels did whatever I asked him."

"There are one or two things you don't understand just yet, though you're awfully clever."

She coloured. "I don't care twopence about servants," she cried, "but I hate Egon. I've always disliked him

from the day we first met at Monte Carlo. And at least I thought him sincere till this business about Giulietta. I won't deny he's the best looking man I ever met."

Konrad bit his moustache. "I don't care so much about being Countess Rheyna," she said, "but I should dearly like to revenge myself on Egon."

"The two would go together," he answered.

"Yes, and by George they shall!" she started up: decision was in her cheeky features, as she rang for her maid.

He looked at her uncomfortably. "What makes you say 'revenge'?" he asked.

"It is a way of speaking. I always want to revenge myself on the very few people I dislike."

With this explanation he was obliged to content himself. But he strongly approved of the telegram which Dickie immediately concocted and sent off. They chuckled over it together. "She will come at once, never fear," said Dickie. "Trust a woman to come at once."

"It is a good action in a way," answered Konrad, "to bring them together again."

"In a way? In every way," replied Dickie. "Such affairs should be ended. Either together again, or for ever apart."

She settled down over her favourite reading—a highly illustrated German periodical, a sort of *Police News* and *Family Herald* combined. In fact that was the only thing she ever read, besides the fashion journals. An occasional laugh—like a bubble—broke away from the brightness of her thoughts. "What fun it will be!" she said to Konrad. Then she prayed her little Catholic prayer and went to sleep.

Next morning she was full of insinuation and innuendo. The day was Maundy Thursday; the Generalin seemed to think it not devoid of religious associations, but at this idea Dickie scoffed. "I must have more religion than you," she said, "seeing I am a Roman Catholic. To-morrow, of course, I shall eat fish, but to-day I am going to enjoy myself." She proved eager to see a good deal of Count Rheyna, whose unusual condition appeared to have a singular fascination for her.

"Do you like pumping?" she said. "Oh, what fun!" and she made him a present of a squirt. He had not been so happy since the day of his seizure. The monotony of the pump was pallid compared with the diversions of the water-

shoot. All over the sitting-room his unsteady hand flung the spray. His laugh mingled with that of the—unrecognised—newcomer. But when, that same evening, a full splash dropped from the banisters on the lady's bare neck and dove-coloured dinner gown, she indignantly demanded of Egon that the thing should be taken away! Her brother-in-law promised to do his best, a difficult matter, big with the prospect of yells and tears.

"A lady is coming this evening," said Dickie half way through dinner, "a—a friend of ours,"—she looked round the table—"I think I may say. I thought you would not mind her coming; we seemed such a pleasant family party—almost complete." She shot a look across at Gertrude, which said quite plainly: "Oh, yes, I can be as nasty as any great lady, when I choose."

"Who is it?" demanded the Generalin.

"Oh, only a friend of ours. We have been too long without her. I telegraphed to her and asked her to come to us for Easter. Easter is a time when old friends—and foes—should meet and say, 'The Lord is risen,' as they do in Russia. There should be no quarrels at Easter, but general reconciliation: don't you think so, Egon?"

"Yes," said Egon.

"And Dorothea——"

She paused, at a loss. She had reckoned on his interrupting her at once. In the terrified silence: "A room will be got ready for your friend," said Egon. "Shall we speak of something else?" Everybody was talking and laughing again in a sudden outburst of conversation.

This incident of her unexpected loss of *sangfroid* seemed to sober Dickie. She might even have been considered a little nervous; still, she enjoyed her dinner and flirted with the infatuated cadets. In the course of the evening she sang them a couple of her banjo songs. Perhaps that was because of her semi-mourning, and because the Generalin thought the day had a religious tint.

"Who is this guest?" said the Generalin, close to her, suddenly, with stern lips and a tremble at the eyes.

Dickie took out her watch. "You will know in ten minutes' time," she said coolly. "Now, which of you boys can sing?"

"I can play Strauss," replied one of the cadets. They were all in the great drawing-room together, under the soft blaze of the wax candles. Egon had come in; he was

playing backgammon with one of the girls in a corner, at the table where, on ordinary occasions, he sat with his uncle and pumped.

They were all in the drawing-room together; an air of uneasiness hung over them, the thunder-cloud as yet only felt. Dickie laughed loudly. Gertrude had gone across to Konrad: "It is impossible," she said. "You are not going to attempt it? It would not succeed."

He stared at her—she so gentle, so unassuming, a girl you never heard or saw. "Are you crazy?" he said.

"Konrad, you are either committing a magnificent error or a crime!"

The boy, at the piano rattled the "*Schöne Blaue Donau*."

"I hear the carriage!" cried Dickie. Her eyes flashed: her cheeks flushed.

A horrible moment of silence fell upon them—a silence they all realised, in spite of the swift clatter of the notes in the corner. None of them stirred to go into the vestibule and welcome misfortune.

The folding doors were flung open. Giulietta stood on the threshold.

The piano stopped with a bang, for the musician had started up. And the moment of silence deepened, as the second between the lightning and the crash.

Then Egon came forward. "I hope you have had a good journey," he said, "Madame la Comtesse." He held out his hand and conducted her to his mother. "Mother," he said, "I do not think you ever met the Countess Pini-Pizzatelli."

Dickie warmly embraced the new arrival and immediately carried her off to her room.

CHAPTER XXII.

"AND why not, pray?" said Dickie. She had pushed her fair head through the old Count's doorway, half-hidden, laughing, against the *portière*. Egon, beside his uncle, had looked up with grave objection: "You should not have asked that lady here."

"And why not, pray?" said Dickie. She nonplussed him so utterly, he did not know what to reply. "Giulietta was all alone at Montreux, boring herself again, with Barbolat," continued the Biermädel. "She had promised to join us in Paris, so I telegraphed to her to come here instead. She wouldn't hurt a fly. Oh, I forgot, Konrad said you didn't like her. What nonsense, Egon! Besides, people ought to make it up at Easter, as I was remarking downstairs."

He sat with his eyes downcast, pumping as methodically as if he had been his uncle. But the uncle did not want the pump, and was crying for his squirt. Egon was absolutely at a loss for a word.

"Admit," continued Dickie, goaded on by wild curiosity, "admit that you are disappointed. You thought it was Dorothea?"

Then he looked up again, full at her. "No, indeed," he said quickly. "Do you think I should have waited for her at backgammon, downstairs?"

"And how would you have waited for her, pray? In the chapel with a candle, so!" She pulled a long grimace, with eyes upturned and hands uplifted, piteous. Uncle Karl, who thought it was a Punch performance, laughed.

"You intended me to believe it was she, but you failed," answered Egon quietly.

Dickie's eyes grew far less pretty. "I am sorry it is only Giulietta," she said.

"I dislike very much seeming inhospitable—still, I should be much obliged if you would ask Madame Pini not to stay over to-morrow."

"Inhospitable? Ah true: to all practical purposes, the house is yours—for the present. But I cannot *possibly* ask her to leave to-morrow. She would not go."

"Because——?"

"Dear me, Egon, don't fly out at me like that! Because to-morrow is Good Friday, and because you cannot expect her to travel on a Friday—on Good Friday, least of all."

Egon sat, his lips compressed. And when Dickie saw him sitting thus, with features which she wanted to call stony while her heart said "statuesque," her own expression, which had been very ugly, broke once more into smiles.

"Stuff and nonsense," she said. "We shall keep her here and have a jolly time together. She's first-rate company, and this place is dull. You ought to divorce Dorothea and marry her, Egon. She'd make you a much better wife."

He rose. "And really," thought Dickie, "he's very tall: he's a long time doing it."

"Don't you think," he said, "we had better leave my uncle? Little things excite him. You must not be angry with me, Elisabeth, but my mother will find some means of suggesting to the Countess Pini that we cannot have strangers in the house just now."

"And the cadets?" screamed Dickie. "Your uncle's well enough, if you let him have a change! You make him ill by locking him up here! Why don't you give him proper clothes and let him come downstairs? Why don't you——"

But at this moment his Excellency, the Head of the Family, whether annoyed by her shrill screaming, or attracted by her wide-open mouth, shot a jet of water, in a shaky sweep, across her, from the squirt recaptured behind Egon's back.

She fled shrieking, but presently calmed down and consulted her watch. Only nine: there was time enough. She concocted a second telegram, this time without even consulting her husband; so she had the chuckling all to herself. The message was in French, its wording brief and decisive:

"Madame de Roden, Brodryck, Holland. Your husband is dying. Come!"

"Aux grands maux les grands remèdes," said Dickie. She sent away the telegram unsigned. There was no difficulty about sending it, for—whatever might be Aurélie's

predilections—Dickie had always assured herself of the dog-like devotion of her husband's man. In fact, if the full truth must be told, the post of valet, about Dickie, had been more permanent, of late, than that of spouse. It is easier any day, says Dickie, to get a good husband than to get a good servant. She knows.

Immediately after having dismissed the man, she threw up her perky, rounded little chin and recalled him. And she wrote her name in full under the message. "So," she said, a word which, in her native language, means everything. Then she lighted a cigarette.

Dorothea still got the telegram that night—quite late that night. The house had to be rung up to give it her. And at six on the Good Friday morning she was driving to the station with sleepless eyes.

At Rheyna, on that Good Friday morning, the whole family—the Protestant part of it—attended the Lutheran village church in a certain amount of state. The peasantry, the tenants, the local authorities stood aside with a special inclination of their backs and their eyes which, amidst the general devotion to the "Herrschaften," already distinguished Egon, walking up the church path with his mother on his arm, as practically "der Herr." Konrad saw this, we may call it, trend. And his thoughts were the thoughts of Jacob.

To his honour be it said that he had always despised, but never disliked, his brother. He had believed in Egon's stupid virtuousness. Only of late had his eyes been opened: he now hated the contemptible hypocrite who had assumed the appearance of being better than other men.

Egon's resolution of avoiding Giulietta all day was foredoomed to failure. "I invite everybody to a concert in the music-room at five o'clock," said Dickie, as she rose from the lunch-table. "Religious music only, of course; Madame de Pini will sing." Dickie had spent the morning with uncle Karl. "He is better than when we came," she said. "I have quite conquered my dread of him. He walks about the hall."

"Walks? Staggers! He might fall at any moment," said young Karl.

"Children should be seen and not heard," replied Dickie, to the delight of the cadets. She added kindly: "Nobody could object to seeing you; so there!"

"Hans must always be there to support uncle Karl,"

put in Egon. "You must never let him try to walk alone."

"Bother Hans," said Dickie. If there was any one at Rheyna she hated after Egon, it was Hans. How had she got to hear, amongst other things, that Hans, speaking of her, had said "people like us"?

At five o'clock, then, the whole party gathered in the music-room. Dickie, in a curly tea-gown, like a pale-blue hyacinth, rummaged among the cups and saucers, and produced a box of genuine "Macarons de Nancy" from her private store. For Dickie had always supplies of cakes and sweetmeats wherever she travelled. These macarons, being made by the "dear, good sisters," were especially suitable fasting fare. "There's a religious flavour about them," declared Dickie. One of the cadets said they were not as sweet as she.

Giulietta was in black, unrelieved, black satin covered with black laces. The sadness, not of certain desolation, but rather of hope depressed.

She sat down to the piano and sang. "I have not touched a note for weeks," she said. Yet she sat down to the piano and sang:

"Ave, Mater lachrymarum!"

They all listened, spell-bound. When she had finished nobody uttered a word.

Then she sang Victor Hugo's "Lines before a Crucifix":

"Vous qui pleurez, venez à lui car il pleure."

Dickie's eyes were full of moisture, and not Dickie's alone. The cadets yawned.

And then:

"O Lord of love, O Lord of tears!

I bring to Thee my hopes and fears!"

But she had scarcely struck a few notes of this when she stopped.

"This is for more voices than one," she said, veering round on the music-stool. "I know that you sing it, Monsieur de Roden! Come, join me: must I do all this labour alone?"

He had foreseen her appeal when the first chords fell upon his ear, but what could he do? He stole out of his corner to the piano:

"O Lord of love, O Lord of tears!

I bring to Thee my hopes and fears!"

Once started, he forgot all but his singing. The impulse, so long deadened within him, awoke throbbing to life. The weeks of dull plodding righteousness—atonement, weary duty, regret—seemed to break away and dissolve like so many ice-bands that had frostened about his heart. The spring of all his artistic emotion bubbled upwards to heaven. The notes in his voice thrilled to hers, blending with them in that union of sympathetic perception, the highest earthly intercourse, of which it is either idle or superfluous to speak. He knew only one thing at the moment: the music that was bearing them upwards: his whole soul was full of his singing, and hers, indistinguishably blended in one:

"For Thou hast suffered and achieved,
And it remains enough for me,
To suffer and achieve, like Thee!"

The words that had risen like the night-wind sank to rest with a wail:

"To suffer and achieve, like Thee!"

Giulietta, playing a few wild discords, hardly in sympathy with the gentle finale, looked up quickly into Egon's face. "I will go to-morrow, if you wish it," she breathed. "But I must speak to you before that, alone!"

He hesitated. "Alone, or before them all. Take your choice!" she said, and she struck two such crashes on the keyboard that the poor Generalin jumped. "Don't make such a horrid noise," cried Dickie.

But Giulietta was gently singing words that appeal to every German mind:

"I never can forget again,
I never can repent,
The God who sees me strive in vain
Declares me innocent."

Egon's heart stood still. What depths of danger threatened him? He looked from one intruder to the other, from Giulietta to Dickie. "That isn't chant music!" laughed Dickie. She got up. "Come, let's take Giulietta over the house!" He bent lower: "My mother! My sister!" he whispered close to the Italian's ear, "I will do anything you wish!"

The four of them—for Dickie selected a cadet—wandered into the picture-gallery. Dickie looked at her watch.

The gallery, chiefly devoted to second-rate pictures and very good armour, runs along the left wing of the building, on the ground floor, and terminates in the chapel. The latter is rather an oratory—in this Protestant eighteenth century mansion, a small apartment with a good deal of gilding like the rest of the house, an Italian octagon, pillared and domed, cherubs, half a dozen Florentine “masters,” a Lutheran altar, a few highly decorated seats. Into one of these Giulietta fell with a gasp, for Dickie had most fatiguingly dawdled among the pictures, as if anxious to delay until dark.

Then Dickie had suddenly disappeared with her faithful retainer. Giulietta and Egon were alone in the twilight of the chapel.

Giulietta looked up. It was not so dark in the soft spring evening but that he could perfectly well see the look in her eyes.

“Speak to me!” she said at last, so gently he only just caught the words.

“What should I say?”

“Have you nothing? I so much!”

She swayed forward. “Bartolommeo has left me. He was a good friend to me: the best I ever had. He has left me. His luck is gone from the day, he says, that he met you at Lyons. You have brought us ruin: we were happy enough.”

She spoke tenderly, sadly. He stood before her, seeking what to reply.

“Do not think I reproach you,” she continued. “You have ruined my life: that is all. You have ruined my happiness. You could not help it. Perhaps you have ruined your own?”

“Yes!” he said.

She started up. “Thank God!” she said. “Thank God! Then it was worth the price—cheap at the price! I would do it all again and gladly. Ay, gladly! ay, gladly!” She made as if she would have held out her hands to him, but drew them back.

“After all, what does anything else matter?” she said. “Happiness! happiness! short, happy happiness. People live and die, and the question is, how much happiness? I am ruined, I suppose. Does it matter? Oh! cheap at the price!”

Two women paused in the gallery. “This way, I think,” murmured Dickie. “Sit here for a moment whilst I go for a light.”

In the chapel Giulietta slightly raised her voice: "Have you nothing to say to me—nothing? My God, have you nothing? Egon, I see through the darkness the working of your face. Egon, we can rebuild our happiness. Egon, I am a woman—see, not an ugly woman, surely? Why did you wrong me so cruelly?—for if you played with me only—then, oh it was most brutal wrong. Egon, I have loved once, once only: I was happy in my ruin. Tell me, when I flung myself at your feet, oh my king, oh my god, tell me it was happiness to you, and not wicked pastime only. Tell me that you meant what you said to me: tell me it was happiness to you: it was sweetness for that one time only. Tell me, you who are wedded to an ice-block, tell me if you have a spark of manliness in you left: tell me that you loved me when I fell!"

"Yes," he said.

She flung herself upon him: the black laces sank away about her bosom. In the wide-open doors of the chapel, with the last beams from the tall windows slanting towards her, stood his wife.

In her stained travelling dress, dusty, weary, worn out with the suspense of that terrible journey to the husband who was dying—

"For love!" said Dickie's laughing voice. She came in with a candle. "I wanted to bring you two together again. I thought he was dying for love of you. Dear me, am I 'de trop?' and are you 'de trop,' Giulietta? Or is Dorothea?"

"It is a plot! It is a plot!" cried Egon wildly. "I swear it. Dorothea, listen to me. Here in this chapel I swear it. Before God—it is a plot!"

"It is not!" exclaimed Giulietta. "If there is to be swearing, I, too, can swear before altars! I am innocent! My God, woman—fool—did you envy me my moment of happiness?"

And before Dorothea could answer—jubilant:

"You may well envy me! You have heard him. Nothing that can happen hereafter can make him unsay it again!"

Then Dorothea opened her lips.

"That is true," she said. They that heard her turned pale.

She addressed her husband: "There is at least one thing you can still do for me," she said. "You can spare me further insults from these women. Would you order the

carriage that fetched me from the station—to—take—me—back—there—again?"

"Dorothea, you will not do that. Let me speak with you! Speak to my mother if you will not hear me. Let me say——" He stopped: the presence of "these women" checked the words in his throat. "Not here," he said haughtily.

"Yes, here," answered Dorothea. "Let me then ask you one question. As you answer it, I will know my own fate. The word which you spoke just now when I entered, that one word—say that you did not mean it—say that it was spoken to this creature in false courtesy, your light courtesy of the world—I can forgive. I can try to understand it."

"Really, Dorothea—'this creature!'" put in Dickie.

"Yes, answer her! Tell her!" cried Giulietta. "Deny! Say it was said in fun—eh? A joke!"

"Say the truth to me. We are alone," said Dorothea.

"Dorothea: God help you to understand. See, I am a man. I love you! But at the time—see, I am human flesh and blood, with human failings. The past is past, dear: here in her presence I reject it. But the word that you heard me speak was not a lie."

"I do not understand," said Dorothea: a blackness came before her eyes: she faltered, and staggered to the door. He ran after her. Giulietta's cry of triumph was ringing in their ears. "We are alone, as you say," he gasped, "alone with God, and nothing—nothing matters. Dearest, you would not have me lie here in His presence. Let us forget the past."

"You love her," said Dorothea.

Giulietta caught the words. "Yes, he loves me! He loves me!" she cried. She filled the whole chapel with her song of jubilation. "He loves me! He loves me! He loves me!" she sang.

But Dorothea did not hear her. For the first time in her life, and the last—struggling not thus to give way before the enemy, struggling to show a brave front and—oh vanity!—a careless—she had sunk down unconscious upon the chapel steps.

"She is dead! She is dead with a lie in her ears!" exclaimed Egon, kneeling beside her. But Dickie laughed loud and long. With the help of the omniscient and omnipresent Bompard, she soon got Dorothea away to a bedroom and locked the door on her recovery under the maid's affectionate care.

"I have nothing more to add," said Egon to Giulietta. "The past is dead. I confess and I repent. For my wife's sake, and your own and mine, I entreat you to leave this house."

"I have played, then, and lost," she answered him sadly, "and your wife has not won."

He stood alone before the altar in the pitch-dark chapel. "My punishment," he said, "is greater than I can bear."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"DEAR me, how things work round!" said Dickie. She sat on the hearthrug in her room with her illustrated *Police News*, her box of macaroons and an immense bunch of many-coloured tulips. She was pulling the flowers to pieces between her little pearly teeth. The next moment, however, a broad grin settled upon her pleasing features.

"Dickie, you're a humbug," she said with a nod. "Things don't work round, but you're the cleverest little woman that ever managed a circus." She felt contented. So she sent for her husband, the only male acquaintance, among many, whom she had ever really loved.

Konrad lighted a big cigar—for the Biermädel wasn't particular—and flung himself down on the bed. "I can't bother about trifles," said Konrad. "Petty intrigue is woman's work. I can shoot a man if you want me to."

Dickie's eyes grew sombrous. "Don't talk about that," she muttered. The bracelet on her rounded wrist had been Archie's wedding gift.

"Have you seen Giulietta out of the house?" she demanded presently.

"Yes."

"Do you think she cared?"

"No." For the worst man, surely, does not betray one woman to another.

"I don't believe you," said Dickie.

"As you like," he answered. He lay back, watching the little rings he blew, wonderful little rings, like the hole of a pistol bullet.

Dickie, with precision of aim, threw a handful of tulips all over him. "I am going," she said, "to see Dorothea. I shall not rest content till I know that she's out of the house."

"There's no hurry. Better let well alone."

She sat up, leaning on her hand and looking towards him. "You are quite wrong," she said, "quite, quite

wrong. If your uncle doesn't take his departure pretty soon, I refuse to answer for results."

"Explain," he replied negligently, "or eat macaroons."

"She loves him: that is all. I saw it this evening. And I felt almost sorry."

"You don't understand women like Dorothea, my pretty. The fonder she is of him the angrier she will be."

Dickie rested her chin on her hand. "I don't understand women like Dorothea," she repeated thoughtfully. "Perhaps not. Yet, I'll tell you one thing no woman ever should confess to any man. When a woman loves a man—no, I *won't* say it. You needn't flatter yourself. There's one person in the world I shall always love better than you."

"I do not mind," replied her husband, "seeing that person isn't a man."

"And there's one—what shall I say?—one power in the world that Dorothea will always love better than Egon."

"What's that? Having her own way?"

"Religion," said Dickie, munching a macaroon.

"I can't help it," she added presently: tears of spite were in her voice. "I want dreadfully to be Countess Rheyna. You can't think how delightful it sounds! 'Frau Gräfin!' And I only had it for such a short time. I never cared a bit about 'Lady Archibald,' which sounds quite silly, as if you were half your husband and half yourself. But 'Frau Gräfin.' I would put a little pill into your coffee to make myself Frau Gräfin again."

"I don't see the connection," replied Konrad somewhat shortly.

"And your coffee is safe. I shouldn't care about the money, though this house is very splendid. But I haven't seen Kauenfels. Is it finer?"

"I have already told you, no."

"You're prejudiced. I don't want more money. Archie and I had five hundred a year, and when I took my first situation, I got a pound a month and my keep."

"And earned a good deal more, I'll be bound," said Konrad bitterly.

"You bet I did! Don't be nasty, Konrad. Twenty thousand a year is a vast lot of money, even for a woman with my great taste in dress."

"Fifty thousand is five times as much," replied Konrad. "Incomes increase that way, like diamonds."

"What?" said Dickie. Getting no answer, she rose, yawned, stretched herself, and went in search of her rival.

She banged at the door, and so loudly demanded her own maid, that Aurélie was compelled to turn the key.

"Lay out my dinner-gown; I will stay with my sister," she said loftily, and established herself at once beside Dorothea's sofa.

"Aurélie," said the latter, "will you see if the carriage has come?"

"You are going at once? You are very right," remarked Dickie. Then Dorothea wondered if she could possibly be acting wrong.

"There are things which no woman can stand," continued the Biermädcl. "I am aware—no one better—that men are not saints. All the same, if Konrad!—" she held up her small fist, "and in a chapel! Fie!"

"I am tired with the long journey and the useless anxiety you caused me. Please leave me in peace," said Dorothea.

"Don't be ungrateful. I thought I was acting for the best"—at this moment Dickie believed her own words—"I expected to see you in Egon's arms—could I help it that we found another lady there?"

Dorothea gazed at this sister-in-law, in the hyacinthine tea-gown, with solemn eyes before whose insistence Dickie's saucer-blue ones slowly dropped.

"It isn't nice to be wicked," said Dorothea, "but it's worse to be clumsy as well."

Dickie bounced about on her chair and shook out the tea-gown. "Oh, of course, you're a mighty deal better'n me," she said, "and a great lady born, and I daresay your ideas about husbands are different. In your class we don't expect 'em to behave decent to women. And, pray, do you mean *me* by 'being wicked'? eh?"

"You have done me a great wrong. God may forgive you: I cannot," replied Dorothea.

Thereupon Dickie broke out into such torrents of Billingsgate, such vulgar and blasphemous abuse as Dorothea had never any previous opportunity of experiencing, nor, humanly speaking, is there any probable danger of her enduring its equal again. The unutterable horror of dirt and indecency came down upon her like a shower-bath—shocking, undeniably, but bracing as well. She was up, in another moment, on her feet, her face set hard, her head thrown well back.

"You cannot say a single word," she spoke coldly, "which hurts me, or insults me in any way whatever."

The other woman fell back, with an ugly laugh. "Can't I," she said. "Can't I hurt you? We shall see."

"No, not you. You can prove to me that others hurt me. But insult me you cannot. Spare your abuse." With trembling hands she took her hat and mantle, and passed by the exasperated Dickie, as if that scion of two peerages had not corporeally existed upon her path.

In the corridor Aurélie attempted a last appeal. "Then, if you will separate from him, take me with you," entreated the French maid with tears. "I can be of no further use here; I detest the Lady Archibald. I will none of her money: take me with you: I will die in your country of mist." But the prospect of Aurélie's pleadings and proposals was more than Dorothea could endure. "The carriage!" she said faintly. With bated breath she slipped down the long deserted gallery, under the solemn eyes of the marble goddesses who gazed down the still perspective, from their niches of gilt *rocaille*. "This way!" whispered the French woman, and guided her former mistress into a side-passage under an arch, towards humbler regions, to a small chamber, of which she hurriedly closed the door.

"Madame," said Aurélie, "I have misled you. There is no carriage, for there is no train. At least here we are safe from Lady Archibald. Madame can now do as she will."

"No carriage? No train?"

"To-day—being Good Friday—there is not the usual little local train to catch the express. Madame must spend the night here: there is no help for it. And, see! the Italian woman is in the house: most fully do I commiserate Madame."

Dorothea did not answer.

"No one knows of Madame's visit except the three who have seen her," continued the maid. "Madame can stay here, if she will—I will say she is gone to the station—tomorrow, very early, Madame can hasten away."

"What room is this?"

"It is an unused room, of—of the servant's quarters. Madame la Générale does not know that Madame is come. I will tell the Lady Archibald that Madame has gone back to the station."

"Do not call her the Lady Archibald; she is my brother

Konrad's wife," said Dorothea bitterly, and sat down, in a confused heap.

"See, I will arrange this couch for the night. Hardly do I comprehend what has occurred, yet no longer would I incite Madame, as at Bel Respiro, to forgive. That Madame has come here, is the doing of that demon, but that Madame finds the Italian, whose doing is this if not Monsieur's? See, a good man is not so good as a good woman, but a bad woman is worse than a bad man. I have seen many men, and always understood them. I do not understand Monsieur: he seemed so excellent. And the servants' hall here that calls him 'Joseph,' the servants' hall that always knows best!"

"Leave me," said Dorothea.

Aurélié obeyed. "I must go dress my lady for dinner," she said: she popped her head through the door again. "The servants' hall here calls him 'Joseph.' Let us try to stick to that!" she said.

Dorothea lay in the dark, with her face open to the darkness, staring straight into the square black room. To get away! To get away! That had been her one, wild yearning. To put *distance* between her crushed heart and Egon's wrong-doing, Giulietta's triumph, Dickie's spite. She could think of no reason for her sister-in-law's action, but simple, evil spite, a bad woman's wish to injure. And that is almost always the wrong reason, as wiser people know. As for Egon—oh, the pity of it, the sorrow of it! A noble heart, wrecked by evil passions, of which she could not even divine the cause or the course. The wickedness of Egon was a madness, perhaps! That thought must be its sole alleviation. There used to be a drunkard at Brodryck who, even the old pastor said, couldn't but drink. They had to lock him up in an asylum. Aunt Emma cried "Nonsense," but aunt Mary had sorrowfully shaken her head.

For Giulietta the injured wife could feel neither the scorn nor the resentment which filled her at thought of Dickie. Giulietta! Ah, surely Giulietta loved Egon! Dorothea wept for Giulietta's misfortune with gentle and pitiful tears.

She heard the distant hum of the great house, the collective noises of the basement. She was away here, in a silent corner, yet her heart beat restlessly behind the locked door, for constant fear that some one would break in upon her secrecy. She felt as an intruder, in danger of discovery.

Here, in her own house, as it were, the home of the Redens, she cowered away, like a criminal, for the first horrible night, in the dark.

Suddenly she leaped up, and listened. A great commotion filled the vast mansion, seemingly thrilling through it from end to end! A new terror of distant outcries, and weeping, the running of many feet. With the swift persistence of a low, electric call to come and view life's tragedy, the current of arisen misfortune swept into this far-away corner an unbroken murmur of alarm. Dorothea stood straining, to hear more. What had happened? It were better—but not possible—to hear less.

Doors opened, and shut, in the distance. Bells rang loudly. It was not that which brought distraction, nor was it the ceaseless patter of anxious feet. The nameless dread lay in the unvoiced sounds of human agitation which trembled, out of sensuous grasp, upon the responsive air.

Dorothea could endure the far uncertainty no longer. She pressed against the door. And at that very moment she heard a voice she recognised crying: "My master!"

She was out in the passage, under the dull light of a lamp, face to face with Hans Sturmer. "What has happened? It is I!"

The servant fell back in alarm. "The most gracious, the Lady Countess!" he stuttered, and, before Dorothea could explain to herself the strange sound of this new title: "His Excellency, my Lord Count, has just dropped himself dead!"

"Dead!" repeated Dorothea, yet in her heart was an immense relief, a gratefulness to God, overflowing.

"It was not my fault, not my fault at all," continued Hans eagerly. "I had been called away to my master, and young Madame Konrad (Hans calls her the Frau 'Lieut'nant') was with him. His Excellency must have hung over the balustrade, as he often did, and lost his balance and gone over—so!" Hans made an energetic movement: Dorothea closed her eyes. "His skull was dashed to pieces on the pavement," added Hans, with the relish of his class for disgusting details, "and his Excellency's brains——"

Dorothea had retreated into the dark of her cabinet.

"God have mercy on his soul," she said, in lowest accents to herself.

"Amen," chimed in the servant, suddenly devout. "I

have a telegram here for the Emperor," he added proudly, "and a number of other telegrams," he said.

"Before you go, one word!" cried Dorothea. "No one knows that I am here, no one but Aurélie. You must keep my secret."

"I always tell my master everything," said Hans.

"Not this thing." Dorothea had closed the door. "You know what misery has come upon us. You have one opportunity—the only one, perhaps, in all your life—of doing me some service. Promise me that you will speak to no one of having seen me here."

"As I hope for salvation!" answered Hans. "My telegram to the Emperor! It cannot wait," he added, and he hurried away.

A moment later came Aurélie with some food, and a lamp, which she lighted. "The old man is dead," said Aurélie. "He broke his skull to pieces on the pavement, and his brains——"

"I know. I know." In a few hurried words Dorothea explained and questioned. "How was Monsieur? What had he said—Monsieur?" Aurélie had not seen Monsieur, who had not appeared at dinner. This had happened immediately after. The Countess Pini had been very gay at table, laughing outrageously, the servants had said.

"Leave me the lamp, if you please," said Dorothea. Mademoiselle Bompard departed to her own, present mistress, who lay barely recovered from hysterics.

"It is a good thing, at least, that the young Countess has left the house," suggested Aurélie, busy with strong-smelling things and pocket handkerchiefs.

"She isn't the young Countess," screamed Dickie.

"Is she not? I do not understand. In the families I have lived in——"

"Servants needn't understand. Throw away those nasty essences and get me something nice to eat. But, as you say, it is a good thing she has left the house, a very good thing—oh, a very good thing," said Dickie.

Dorothea lay in the light of the lamp, the more of it the better! The house had again grown silent, but now the dull silence was heavy with death. She wondered if Egon, in some far part of it, was watching by the dead man's side. The skull had broken on the marble pavement. His Excellency's brains——

She turned up the lamp. Perhaps the room they had put him in was quite close, just above her. Perhaps Egon was near her. She lay trembling. No, that would hardly be likely. The lamp began to smoke. She had to rise again, stiff, and turn it down.

And then, in the deepest night-hours, a terrible thing came upon her, for it seemed to her that aunt Mary stood yonder, in the shadows of the lamp. Aunt Mary's eyes were clearly set upon her, in sadness and reproof.

Dorothea sat up, spell-bound, and stared back at aunt Mary. She wondered if she blew out the lamp, would the vision go? She did not dare to make the trial, for she had no matches. Her teeth chattered.

"I found him in Giulietta's arms!" she said suddenly, aloud.

"Yes," she said, many minutes later, "I found them in the chapel: they were saying their prayers!"

Aunt Mary did not move.

"Why should I hush, aunt Mary? Why should women always hush? You think that is our only duty. To suffer in silence and let men grow worse and worse. To hush, as you hushed in your ruined happiness, because your father bade you: to creep away, like my mother, wounded, in a corner and die! No, I am going to say what I think quite loud, to let every one hear it. We women, also, we have a right to our hearts. To defend them, like castles. I was thinking it out, as I lay here. Don't look at me like that, aunt Mary! A man rushes through us, like an open town, and leaves devastation behind him. I am going to fortify myself, to protect myself—I am going to build walls!"

Aunt Mary did not move. But a strange voice said quite clearly in the stillness: "You are young, you must have a divorce and marry again."

Dorothea shuddered to the wall. She looked fearfully around, in the emptiness. "I am so tired," she whispered, "so tired. To-morrow at daybreak I shall go home for good."

She fell to musing, with closed eyes, of the change that must come over the family. She knew that she was not yet the Countess, as Hans had mistakenly called her. Soon it would be decided whether Egon or Konrad was lord of all this great estate. Particulars of the entail she had never heard, or she had forgotten them. She remembered that lots must be cast some day. She tried to collect her thoughts, but found that she could not. She opened her eyes again, wide.

"He too is dead! dead! dead! Never mention his name to me again!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Yes, I have sent for you : I want to speak to you," said Egon.

Konrad's reply was a sneer. "To hear is to obey," murmured Konrad. His glance travelled around the room they were in with a quiet assumption of mastery. It was the octagon, which opens out of the library, a small room in that house of vast apartments, full of sporting trophies, and panelled with paintings of the chase.

"You are the elder," continued Konrad, as Egon seemed to find it difficult to proceed. "Do you object to my lighting a cigar?"

"He disliked smoking in these rooms," answered Egon.

"Isn't he dead?" replied Konrad. There was another awkward pause. Konrad lit his cigar.

"The lawyers will be here about twelve," began Egon. "It is now nine. There are several things I want to say."

"Say on." Konrad threw himself into an easy chair and stretched his limbs out in various directions.

"I want to say, in the first place," continued Egon, greatly agitated, "that I understand the whole—the whole intrigue which has brought my wife and the Countess Pini here together. I understand it all."

Konrad took his cigar from between his lips. "I haven't the faintest conception what you mean," he said.

"I wish I could believe you. I should be almost happy to think it was only your wife."

"Poor Dickie!—wherein has she offended you?"

"You know as well as I do, Konrad, that the married sons and their wives must assemble immediately to decide the succession, or must show good cause for their stopping away."

"Yes. Is Dickie responsible for your quarrels with your wife?"

"No, but——"

"Or can Dickie recall Dorothea to Rheyna?" Konrad straightened himself a bit : his green eyes were blazing.

"What you say is just," answered Egon, striving to steady himself. "Although she has done her best to make a reconciliation impossible, it is not your wife who is responsible in the first case, but I."

"I should think so," replied Konrad, subsiding. "Then leave me in peace. Have you anything else to say?"

"Were it not so, I should act very differently."

"Act as you like. I understand your annoyance at having thrown away all chance of the succession, but really you have only yourself to blame."

"Yes," answered Egon softly and waited a moment. He drew a long breath. "You are quite sure then, Konrad, that the law will proclaim you Count Roden-Rheyna?"

"*Parbleu!* it seems to me that I am the only brother who can prove that he lives with his wife!" Konrad laughed: his eyes drooped round the room.

Egon steadily paced the floor. "You can have this heritage," he said at last, standing opposite his brother. "I do not want it."

"Indeed? Thank you!"

"No, I do not want it. I am eager to get away and *do* something. To do something of my own, with my own hands. To work. If I became Count Rheyna, I could never do anything else but be that."

"Are you going to be a stone-mason?" answered Konrad. "Or a carpenter? Oh, nonsense! I'll allow you sufficient to get along."

"On the other hand, *you* will settle into the *rôle*; the immense responsibility will shape you against your will. As for your wife, we must try to believe you have married a Countess Kauenfels."

Konrad rose to his lazy feet. "This useless and insulting conversation——" he began.

"It is neither," said the elder brother quickly. "I am willing you should have the whole thing, but here are my conditions." He held out a sheet of paper from the table.

"Conditions!" exclaimed Konrad. He made as if he would have thrown the paper aside, but curiosity mastered him.

It was a document undertaking, under penal restrictions, never to sell or mortgage an acre of the vast property excepting to a Roden. "What folly is this?" demanded Konrad. "I always thought you were cracked!"

"Konrad, you can have the property, but you must keep it

intact. Even the great mass which is not entailed. There's heaps of it, but if you or Dickie were to play as you did at Monte Carlo no one knows what might happen. The *peasants* must belong to a Roden, Konrad: in all other matters you can do as you like."

"What a fool you are!" said Konrad. He flung down the paper and walked towards the door.

"Stop!" said Egon.

"Really, you must excuse me. I want to go and make Dickie laugh."

"There is that on my lips, Konrad, would *make* you stop. Don't let me speak it. Sign this paper."

"Pooh!" said Konrad, but he halted.

"You refuse?"

"You are crazy."

"And you really rest absolutely assured that your runaway English marriage cannot be attacked in German law?"

"Yes, by G——!" cried Konrad, turning white. "It wasn't a runaway marriage. They told me at the Embassy—at the Consulate, it was legal. I was specially particular—you lie!"

"Possibly it might have been legal, but not within that period of time."

"They must have known, at the Embassy, of the death of a man like Kauenfels," gasped Konrad.

"Possibly, but not at the Consulate. If you inquired fully, it is certain they did not know. But you probably did not allude to the date of the former husband's death?"

"What does it matter? He was dead," blustered Konrad. "You are trying to frighten me, Egon—I am not such a fool as you think."

"The marriage is legal unless it is attacked. It can only be attacked by those who have a direct interest in doing so. I can attack it." Involuntarily Egon drew himself up.

"You lie," answered Konrad.

"Your attitude is foolish: time presses: you had much better accept facts. It is my earnest desire to let this marriage stand—I swear it before Heaven. I cannot endure the idea of an annulled marriage: the misery, the hopeless disgrace it brings down upon the woman. If I speak, I destroy both your lives—hers, at any rate. The thought disgusts me. Do not drive me to desperate means."

"What do you want me to do?"

"If you force me, I shall presently, before the magistrate, protest against your marriage as invalid. Then, of course, will follow the inevitable legal procedure——"

"Giving you time to make friends with Dorothea!"

Egon coloured. "Or else lots will be cast between us."

"No, no, there will be a reconciliation! Egon, what do you want?"

"Sign that deed," said Egon. "It makes you Lord of Rheyna."

But at that moment the library door was pushed open, and a boyish voice cried: "Wait a bit!" The Child stepped into the room, very pink and smart in his uniform of a cadet.

"Just listen to me first, for a minute," he remarked.

"Eavesdropping?"

"Yes: I have heard everything. I should like to have heard more."

"Then why didn't you stay behind your door?" scowled Konrad.

"Well, I thought that the moment had come for me to put in an appearance. Look here, Egon," continued the Child, "I confess that I spied on you. Don't be waxy. You're not going to surrender the whole thing to Konrad?"

"My-dear lad, what can I do with it, even supposing I did get it, which, of course, is quite uncertain? My life is done for, anyhow—don't you see?—I shall never marry any one else: I shall never have children. It will come to him *anyhow*: much better let it come now, with a good grace, than after I have got killed in the Colonies, and he has been dishonoured for life." He turned to Konrad: "If the thing were mine," he said, "indubitably mine, not only a chance in the lottery——"

"Well?"

Egon shrugged his shoulders. "I shall never have children," he said. "Dickie's honour is safe."

"You forget this poor boy's hopes," smiled Konrad, "but he doesn't."

"Konrad, you are a cad," cried the Child hotly. "It isn't true, Egon: of course my chances are *nil*. I can't marry for years, and, long before that, you will be reconciled to Dorothea. Yes, yes, you will be reconciled to Dorothea! I never was in the running: I've no claim upon anybody!"

"That is so," said Egon. "I've thought a great deal about you, Karl, all night. You never had the slightest expectations. You wouldn't have known even of this, had you not listened. You are a minor. You couldn't compete for two years. And I don't think I could destroy Konrad's marriage just to give you a third of a very improbable chance!"

"Of course not," said the Child.

"Think what it means for a woman having her marriage invalidated. What becomes of her? She's done for. I feel as if we were fighting here over Dickie's soul."

Konrad stood staring at his elder brother, with a strange smile in his meaningless eyes.

"Perhaps that sounds foolish," continued Egon, looking down. "I shouldn't have said it." Suddenly he took up the paper and tore it across. "Do as you like," he said. "I've lost. I can't play out your wife's last chance of becoming a decent woman against you."

Konrad flushed brick-colour: "How dare you speak like that?"

"I have said, after all, the one thing I didn't want to say all the time. I have said it. The whole pride and glory of the Rodens must go against one evil woman's soul!" He bit his lips over the breaking passion of those final words, and walked away to the window, and stood looking out.

At last he turned.

"Why are you still there?" he said. "Go. I promise you I shall be silent. I can't knock down a woman."

"But I can!" cried the Child. "And I will tell the lawyers that this marriage won't hold good!"

"You are a minor: no magistrate will listen to you," said Egon, smiling gravely.

"But the scandal will be the same," quickly answered the Child. "I'll set the whole thing going, at any rate! Unless you get Dorothea here! That is *my* condition. Do you hear me, Egon? I am in deadly earnest. You sha'n't let the earldom of Rheyna go without a struggle. Konrad *shall* fight fair. I don't care. Don't stop me. I don't want to cheek you. I know I've no chance: I'm a minor. Telegraph to Dorothea: let her answer at once that she is coming. She will if she knows the truth."

The two elder brothers exchanged glances.

"I don't know where Dorothea is," answered Egon.

The Child stamped his foot. "How can you say that? You know she is at Brodryck. Will you telegraph?"

"No."

"Then I will," replied Karl, and retreated to the library door.

"Karl, stay here."

"I will not. It is your own fault. Either she answers at once, or I speak."

He was gone. The other two men still stood gazing at each other.

"By G——, we must find Dorothea!" cried Konrad, and rushed from the room.

CHAPTER - XXV.

"My marriage invalid!" screamed Dickie. "My marriage annulled!" She upset all the things on her bed: she jumped about in a whirlwind of laces. "And what, pray, is to become of my plans for presentation? You promised me only this morning, that some day, with patience, I should go to Court as the Countess of Roden-Rheyna!"

"It's another Court you'll have to go to," replied her consort glumly.

She screamed. "You said you could shoot a man," she said to him.

"Whom do you want me to shoot?"

"Egon."

"It isn't Egon, you duffer: your honour is safe in his hands, as he calls it. 'Tis the Child—d—— him—who is going to speak."

"I never hurt the Child," she said plaintively, "and, Konrad——" She looked up at him with her innocent blue eyes.

"What?"

"I have ruined Egon's last chance of happiness."

"It's too late to think of that now," he said surlily.

"I'm not sure: I could tell *her*."

"Tell her? Have you lost your wits? She wouldn't believe you. And is that the way you save your reputation?"

"True, she wouldn't believe me."

"The first thing is to find her! We have only a couple of hours left; that boy will do as he says. And adieu to all chance of your being Countess Rheyna!"

Dickie screamed again, and, thoroughly unnerved, burst into tears. "We must find her!" she shrieked. "Oh, *mon Dieu*, to think that I drove her from the house a few hours ago! Go then, Konrad, thou idiot, find her! Bring her back: let them cast lots between us. At the worst thou canst surely provide loaded dice!"

Konrad laughed somewhere down in his throat. "It is fool's work," he said, "but I'll send telegrams to all the big stations between this and Brodryck!" He sat down at a table and began covering it with hastily scrawled despatches.

"She must come back! She must come back!" cried Dickie, vainly endeavouring to check her tears.

Meanwhile, the Child, having laboriously concocted, after many corrections and much knitting of eyebrows, his single message to Brodryck, crept solemnly downstairs. His eldest brother stopped him and marched him down the gallery: the goddesses looked after them, from the niches of gilt *rocaille*.

"Only one word," said Egon. "I don't want to see your telegram. Your chances are really *nil*. You are a minor; even if we got the marriage annulled, they wouldn't wait two years. But I give you fair warning that whatever you say about Dickie will be no use to me. I have set my heart on this. I won't pay the price. If you force my hand, I shall abdicate my rights. I can always do that, you know. I can refuse."

He spoke very quietly. The Child looked askance at his face.

"That settles it," the younger brother said piteously. "I suppose you know best. But you'll let me send my telegram, Egon?"

"I will let you send your telegram on one condition: you must promise me not to speak to a soul of this secret you have learnt in a not too honourable manner."

"About the marriage, you mean?"

"About the marriage, of course."

"I promise," cried the boy excitedly. "Let me go—I haven't a moment to spare."

Egon looked after him. "She cannot have got back to Brodryck yet," reflected Egon, "and even if she has, she would never consent to come here after last night."

Karl, in his hasty search after an absolutely trustworthy messenger, stumbled upon Hans.

"The very man!" he cried. "Hans, you must hurry off at once to the station!"

"But I cannot: I must attend my master," said Hans.

"It is for your master: it is on his service. It is of the greatest importance. His whole future is at stake!"

"Whew!" said Hans.

"Hans, you are the best friend my brother has. There is not a moment to be lost. Unless this telegram goes at once to the station, he will never be Lord of Rheyna!"

"Impossible?" cried Hans.

"Impossible? It is certain!" shouted the excited Child, dragging him along. "Hans, I would give my chance of my epaulettes, if my sister-in-law came here!"

"Is the telegram about that?" demanded Hans, standing still.

"Yes. Come on, I say! Here, hurry down this passage!"

"Can a decent man break his word?" questioned Hans, running on.

"No, of course not—at least, not an officer!"

"A poorer man might?" gasped Hans.

"No, he mightn't. Here, that is the shortest cut, through the archway! I tell you, my brother's whole life is at stake. We must find, within the next two hours—we *must* find—my sister!"

"Here goes my chance of salvation," said Hans, stopping dead. "If I'm to be damned, it may as well be for Herr Egon. She's here."

The Child nearly fell down the staircase. "What?"

"I swore to her as I hoped for salvation—— Never mind. There's a text, isn't there?—about good and faithful servants?"

"Oh, stop that!—have you lost your senses?"

"You needn't send your telegram. Come back down the lobby. She is there."

Hans led the astonished boy back to a side-passage and knocked at a door. "Who is that?" came the answer in accents which caused the Child to tremble in his shoes.

"It is I; it is Hans." In another moment Karl stood confronting the pale face of Dorothea.

"Dorothea! Does Egon know you are here?"

"No—unless Hans has told him."

"I'll be bound he has not. Oh, Dorothea, I am so glad, so glad. You will save him."

"How save him?" she questioned coldly.

"My uncle is dead. Within a couple of hours the succession will be decided. If you are not there—or have not explained your absence—it goes to Konrad—and to Dickie! You must come."

"Did Egon send you?"

"Do you know him as little as that?"

"You are right," said Dorothea softly.

"You must come to the big drawing-room at twelve. They will all be there."

Dorothea shuddered and covered her face with her hands.

"I cannot," she said.

"You do not mean that. You can't mean it."

"What else can I do? Yes, I mean it. I cannot go back to—him. He is dead to me. You bid me go back as his wife." She fell to trembling so violently, she sank against the wall.

"I am a Roden: I am not accustomed to beg. Think of Dickie! Think of the honour of our house—it is in your hands."

"Do you not understand?" she cried. "*Can* you not understand? The honour of your house? My honour! My honour. They would say I kept away from him till now, and had gone back to him to-day, in spite of everything, for the sake of—the title!" Still she clung against the wall. "That is what that woman, those women, would say—I will not go back to him. I, too, have a right to my fair fame, my decent name! To go back to him *now* as his wife? I will not go back to him."

She stared at him with haggard eyes.

"That is what that woman would say," she repeated, "and you know it! She would judge me by herself. You would all judge me by yourselves. That is what she and her husband have intrigued for. They would rob, they would murder for it. It is what you all live for and strive for—title, grandeur, money, this house! Decency, cleanliness, honesty, a woman's peace, a woman's purity—these are nothing! Come back to him—come back to him *now*! He can make you Countess Rheyna!" She threw herself on the couch, on which she had lain throughout the night, and burst into passionate weeping. "Oh, my God! my God! to keep oneself unspotted from the world!"

"Not titles and grandeur only," said the Child, standing by the door, with trembling lips. "Think of the peasants here; a couple of thousand souls. Think of Egon. And of Dickie as ruler of Rheyna." He stood by the door, still, in silence, but she, with averted countenance, motioned him away.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"It's all right," said Konrad to Dickie, "the Child's just been with me: he was crying like the child he is, though he pretended to be biting his lips all the time. But he promised to hold his peace. My dear, I congratulate you. There's no answer to the telegrams. You are Countess of Rheyna!"

"What fools we were, then, to send telegrams," answered Dickie. "I shall pay out that Child: you bet. Why, I offered him everything, in reason and out of reason."

"When?" demanded Konrad, with lowering brow.

"An hour ago, but he wouldn't even listen: he ran past me, downstairs."

"What did you offer him?"

"How lovely!" replied Dickie, "to be Countess of Rheyna. Oh! what a fright and an escape. I shall send the most gorgeous candles with coronets to Notre Dame de Bon Secours!"

"Meanwhile, come downstairs. I cannot think what is actuating Karl. He says Egon has forbidden him. Rubbish!"

Dickie stood in front of her looking-glass. "I wonder what toilette would be most suitable," she said. "I had been thinking of it all the morning till you came and gave me that useless fright. Mourning isn't necessary till the day of the funeral. Dear me, I shall have to go into mourning again," she sighed deeply, then added with a relish: "Constant mourning is the lot of the great. Yes, when you get to Court, you will have to wear Court mourning, Dickie." She clasped her hands. "The grey and silver will be best," she said. "Chastened, yet becomingly gorgeous. And—oh, Konrad! I can have all my Kauenfels coronets back!"

"No, indeed!" he answered, smiling. "Ours are different—surely you have noticed that?"

"I saw it was a different shape," she said. "I didn't

"think it mattered as long as all the Baronesses knew it was a Countess's." She drove him away while she robed herself, with Aurélie's assistance. Then she took his arm and went down the marble staircase quite gaily to where all the others were assembled in the great saloon.

Among the dull officials—the men of law and government—her entrance created a restrained sensation. They gazed towards her, furtively, from the corners of their eyes. Her fair hair was magnificently frizzed: her slightly vulgar charms were all manifest: the grey and silver swept stylishly about her beautiful limbs.

With one glance of appreciation she enveloped the important old gentleman with the orders, the other functionaries—the young one quite good-looking: she smiled. "I shall manage," she said to herself, "once I have gained my position. I shall manage wherever I go." And then, as these strangers were watching, she went up quite prettily to the old Generalin, and curtsied and kissed her hand.

The three ladies of the family sat on one side, to the right of the long table. The three men on the left. The pallid spring sunshine crept in through the tall windows and spread itself over the paintings, the curled and twisted gilt carvings that branched up to the clouds of the ceiling, the goddesses gazing and laughing above.

"Herr von Roden," began the pompous person with the orders, addressing himself to no one in particular, "the necessary formalities have—ahem!" (a look at some papers before him)—"been properly observed. His Excellency, my Lord Count, your lamented uncle, is unfortunately—I mean, ahem!—he is demised." Konrad's self-satisfied expression rippled over with the faintest of grins. The pompous speaker observed it.

"By formalities, I mean," he stammered, "not the fact of his Excellency's demisal—demise, I should say—but the official recognition of that fact in the document which I will now—ahem!—proceed to read aloud."

While he was droning his statement, the heavy stable clock boomed twelve.

He started: "Dear me," he said, looking over his spectacles, "we are all here—I believe—ahem!—the clock in this room is too fast!"

"My uncle always liked it to be so," remarked Egon.

"But we need not wait, I understand. There is no one else coming?"

"No one," said Egon.

The old man resumed his reading. He constantly mistook. His bald crown and red forehead bobbed up and down behind the foolscap. Once Dickie, from sheer nervousness, laughed.

"Deceased——" said the reader, and stopped in amazement.

"I didn't laugh at that," said Dickie, blushing. "I laughed at something else."

The Generalin folded her thin hands on her lap. Suddenly Dickie remembered Kauenfels' story of the noble mother who had prayed nightly for the removal of her own son. Dickie nodded. "I don't intend," she thought uncomfortably, "to remove."

The old man had sat gazing contentedly at the young Frau von Roden. He laid down his document. "The next thing," he said, with overwhelming magniloquence, "is to decide who succeeds to the title and estates. It is for that we are gathered here." No member of the family answered anything, so the notary, from his corner, said: "Exactly!" and coughed.

"According to the conditions of the entail, lots must be cast between all sons of the same father, who are of age, and married. The married take precedence of the unmarried, or of those who, although married, do not live with their—ahem!—wives. There is, I understand, no primogeniture?" He looked round the circle.

"Of course not," replied Egon, with slight irritation, for the man knew all this, had always known it as well as himself.

"The arrangement is far-seeing. It does all it can to—ahem!—preserve the family and to prevent—ahem!—simulated marriages. I understand, Herr von Roden, that there are two married sons, but——"

"One of them lives separated from his wife," said Egon swiftly, "and their separation is definite. My brother, Konrad, is heir to the title. Can we not settle this, if you please, immediately, and have done?"

"Yes, can we not finish? It is very unpleasant," piped Dickie. The Generalin heaved a sigh, which said more than either of the others had uttered: her daughter took her hand. The Child kicked out one foot, and Konrad smiled.

"Certainly! Certainly!" spluttered the functionary, greatly put out. "All in good time, my dear sir: these things are not trifles to be slurred over. A—hem! Before

we proceed to declare that Herr Konrad von Roden succeeds to all his defunct uncle's titles and dignities, we must—ahem!—conform to the prescribed ceremonial. I understand that it is very painful for one member of this family especially: still, it cannot be helped. Herr von Roden,”—and now he pointedly turned to Egon—“you permit me?” Egon gave a hasty sign of assent. The fat old gentleman stumbled to his feet: the notary followed his example: all rose, in a wide half circle, with the great room stretching beyond.

“It is my duty to call thrice to those who are absent—and who ought to be here.” He spoke the words simply, and with feeling: for a moment the queer, snuffy old creature grew dignified in the dignity of the hour.

“Frau Egon von Roden—geborene Dorothea Sandring—Brodryck!”

A dead silence ensued. A breathless listening for nothing. The gods and goddesses in the ceiling gazed down.

“Frau Egon von Roden—geborene Dorothea Sandring—Brodryck!”

“*Ach*, the comedy!” gasped Dickie.

“Frau Egon von Roden—geborene——”

The great folding-doors at the far end of the saloon fell wide open, and a servant cried, with a shout into the silence:

“Die Gnädige Frau!”

Dorothea came across the oak floor, with their terrified eyes—terrified all but the Child’s—fixed upon her. She was pale as wax, in her stained travelling clothes of the day before: she stopped opposite the silver splendours of Dickie. She shrank back. And, turning her deep eyes on the Child, she said softly: “I am here. You see, dear, I have thought of the two thousand. Please, what do they want me to do?”

“Lord, you can’t have got our telegrams!” cried Dickie. She had run forward, bending, with clenched fists.

“This,” said the functionary, dropping all his papers, “makes a very great change indeed!”

Egon was at his wife’s side. “Dorothea! Dorothea!”

But the little Generalin had been even quicker. She had drawn these, her two children, her favourites, together: she had taken their hands, and led them forward. “I demand,” she cried, “the casting of lots. God in Heaven will decide!”

"Certainly, certainly," said the distracted old commissary. "But of course all this is exceedingly confusing. Sit down, please. Let us sit down. The notary will follow precedent, in the drawing of lots."

"I pray God," said the old Generalin solemnly, "that He, in His wisdom and His justice, may guide all things aright."

"Amen," said her daughter.

"Am I to put the Frau Generalin's words in my minutes?" demanded the young clerk from his corner.

"They are not part of the precedent," replied the notary. "Does the Frau Generalin consider them as spoken officially?"

"I consider them as heard," replied the Generalin.

The old man rapped his fingers on the arm of his chair. "Gentlemen," he said, "we will proceed. I must request the candidates to come forward to this table, in company with their respective—ahem!—consorts."

The candidates, and the consorts, obeyed. They stood well in front, before the little circle. Dorothea's hands were clasped loosely: her eyes were downcast.

"The question which I must now put to you two gentlemen I must put in accordance with the customs of an age when public registers were not what they are now. We follow precedent, gentlemen, precedent. But it is six hundred years since this ceremony was first enacted, and fifty since it last took place between your father and his brother. Herr Egon von Roden, will you take the hand of the lady, your wife!"

Outwardly collected, Egon obeyed, but Dorothea, despite her own emotion, felt the tremor of his grasp.

The old man once more stood up. "In the face of God," he said, "and of your liege lord, the Elector of Brandenburg, now his Majesty of Prussia, do you, Egon von Roden, recognise this woman at your side as your legal and loyal spouse?"

"I do," answered Egon, and Dorothea's heart stood still, at thought of the question which would now be put to her.

But the functionary turned to Konrad and repeated his formula.

"Of course," said Dickie.

"My dear Madame, I fear in the days we are recalling"—the old man smiled a little maliciously—"the ladies of a

family were not asked to express their opinions quite as often as now."

"They were bad times," said Dickie. Her temper had been tried. And she believed in what she called a "put-up thing" between Egon and Dorothea. Her own life was full of put-up things.

"And now it only remains to cast lots," said the commissary, the only person present who was thoroughly enjoying himself. "Formerly, as you are probably all aware, this matter was determined by a tournament, the only rational solution, assigning the 'headship' of the house to its strongest representative—that institution was abolished by the Emperor Charles the Fifth after Konrad von Roden had slain one of his six brothers in the trial. Since then you have trusted to the hazard of the die!"

He slowly, and rather pompously, unlocked the case of faded crimson velvet which stood before him. There was a certain amount of precision about this: the notary had to produce, and to verify, the key. A battered gold cup made its appearance, containing two yellow-ivory cubes.

"Does either of you gentlemen wish to test the dice?"

"Yes," said Konrad, and threw the stones half a dozen times, on the table, before them all.

Then the old man, frowning, took the gold cup from him. "Stand aside, if you please, every one!"

"The first throw, as there are only two candidates, is for both. In the name of the Father!" The bits of ivory rattled and fell. The notary and his clerk had taken up their stations, one at each end of the table.

"Seven!" they both cried aloud.

The candidates were invited to see for themselves. The dice were gathered up and replaced in the cup.

"In the name of the Son!"

"Ach Gott!" gasped Dickie, with her handkerchief to her lips, and sank down into the nearest chair. But her staring eyes were on the table still. Dorothea stood, as a statue, immovably filled with the prayer of the Generalin.

"Nine! Nine and seven is sixteen. Sixteen is the number of Egon von Roden."

The old lady and her daughter had come close. They were all straining now, with bated breath, by the table.

"In the name of the Holy Ghost!"

The cup rattled: the dice clanged across the table.

"Four and two is six. Thirteen is the number of Konrad von Roden."

"Damnation!"—but no one had heard that stifled cry.

The commissary had raised his voice. "Permit me to present to you my humble congratulations, my Lord Count von Roden-Rheyna! I ask you permission to humbly kiss your hand, most gracious lady—Countess of Roden-Rheyna."

All pressed round, the relations affectionate, the legal witnesses obsequious. They were about Egon: his face had grown hard in its endeavour to retain its composure. Dickie, who had lain back in her chair, rose suddenly. She went straight up to Dorothea, standing in a trance, and put both her arms round her sister-in-law's neck. "I wish you joy from the bottom of my heart," she said prettily and bit her in the cheek. The commissary said afterwards to the lawyer that he never saw a graceful deed more exquisitely done. Dorothea did not cry out.

"According to precedent," said the notary, "the moment is now come for the new Count and Countess to present themselves to the household in the central hall. I have taken the liberty to give instructions—permission, I should say—to the steward——"

"That part of the function may well be omitted," interrupted Egon hastily.

"It seems to me very desirable——" began the commissary.

"Very desirable," insisted the Generalin.

"The Countess, my wife, is too much fatigued," said Egon, and he led her, with quick, newly-gathering dignity, down the saloon, to a side door, and into a shaded, silent boudoir. From outside came the hushed murmur of many voices. He stood opposite the couch on which she had fallen. She drooped, stricken, with one hand before her eyes. He stood opposite her, gazing—yearning to cast himself at her feet, to embrace her, to fold her upon his breast, pleading, praying, confessing—he stood silent before her.

For he realised that between them, since yesterday, lay a deeper separation than ever, not because of his sin, which perchance she could pardon, and which he could repent, but because of her knowledge, in a heart that understood not, how the memory of the past, in his bosom, would never be a memory of unmitigated pain. He stood looking at her, till his eyes were blinded: for a moment he could see her no more.

When at last she lifted her sad gaze, she was alone.

An hour later she stole from the Castle—from the great house, seemingly deserted as the Coventry of Godiva. A close carriage stood in waiting by the entrance. She got into it and was driven to the station. She looked up, in a swift farewell, to the dead, white front with its lines of sealed windows—the castle banner drooped, half-mast high, on the roof.

The station-master stood at the carriage-door. "Was befehlen die gnädige Frau Gräfin?" he said.

She looked at him. "When the train comes up," she said, "please give me a compartment to myself."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"HE loves her. Did I stay, he would live with me and love her." With the weary iteration of a sledge-hammer that reflection went on beating at Dorothea's brain. She felt it could never be otherwise: life is resistless. And that Egon had fallen in love with Giulietta was perhaps not even his fault—so far had her knowledge of human hearts now developed; perhaps it was possibly hers—Dorothea's. What, however, did such considerations alter or avert? What mattered was *this*, that it gratified him once more to come in contact with the author of their sorrow, that his words had been full of a dead sweetness, slow with an exquisite regret. Love is eternal—too well do we learn that lesson; then, why should Egon love more briefly than she? For, of the passion whose goal is not affection, the dead satisfaction whose memory is not loathing, Dorothea understood as little as we read in a closed book.

And ceaselessly she recalled the words which Dickie had hissed into her ear, when pretending to embrace her: "You'll stay with him *now*!"

Oh, she knew these people, high and low! Swiftly had she made up, by her latter-day experience, for the long seclusion of her youth. The three mysterious, untouched adversaries of her childhood's innocence, the world, the flesh, and the devil—aunt Mary's phantom horrors—she fancied she had met them face to face. She trembled in her loathing. To keep ourselves unspotted from the world!

Yet of Egon—for our human hearts, thank God! are made for human wear and tear in daily struggle—of Egon all her thoughts were love and gentleness unspeakable. God would touch his heart and lead him back into her Paradise, where purity sits unashamed. She did not doubt his tenderness for her. What most distressed her, almost beyond power of endurance, was the torturing self-question why she had failed to make him happy, how she had let his heart fall in with Giulietta, what blame was hers that

gave strange love a place. He had been fond of her, until he adored Giulietta. She lay back against the cushions, and reflected on Giulietta, Giulietta, till her eyelids were red with shame.

At Hanover, as the train stood resting under the great station roof, a man ran along the carriages with a telegram. He was calling her name. She took the paper eagerly. Was it a message from Egon? A recall?

It was Konrad's futile summons: "Uncle dead. Return immediately. Most important."

The same experience awaited her at Dortmund. "Most important. Return. Return." She tore up the papers, with dull wonder, why Konrad, of all men, should have wanted her back?

At Oberhausen, where, of course, she had to change, she found her father standing on the platform.

"I have most important news for you, Dolly," he said excitedly. "Things have happened——"

"I know," she replied. "They have made me Countess of Rheyna."

"And you are here? Countess of Rheyna! My dearest child, receive a fond parent's—no, I am not going to say 'blessing': I am not an utter fool—warmest congratulations. So it has come right: I always thought that lottery business disgraceful. Providence has interfered. I have always believed in Providence. So now you are Countess of Rheyna. God bless you, it is a magnificent thing."

"I want to get back to aunt Mary."

"Dorothea, I would that your mother had lived to see this day."

"I would she had lived," said Dorothea gravely, but she doubted the wisdom of her own words, as she spoke them.

The Colonel twirled his moustache. "I am not sure she would have cared. She was strange in some things, like yourself."

Dorothea turned to him, on the station platform with kindling face: "Was that why you put those words on her grave?" she said.

"Yes," replied the Colonel gently, and he felt that he had hopelessly given himself away.

They went into the waiting-room, for they had an hour to wait. The Colonel produced a packet of envelopes, a note from aunt Mary, a couple of indifferent missives, a letter from Mark.

Dorothea read first aunt Mary's kind words of faith and prayer. There was not much advice about them, only aunt Mary's older counsel of striving to find out God's will. "Ask the Almighty to keep you from mistaking," that was her philosophy in a word. As all her morality was: "Think kindly. Think kindly of every one: you cannot always think well."

Then Dorothea opened Mark Lester's letter.

"Dorothea, I want to tell you something. It is best that I should tell you, and you will tell the others. Besides, I want, somehow, that you should hear it direct from me: I could not bear to think that others should tell you. I am not better, Dorothea. In fact, I am much worse. Yes, I had better tell you the whole truth, and you will break it to those at home. You will be sorry, but you will realise also that, after all, it doesn't so very much matter, excepting for those at home. I was always much worse than you thought. I ought never to have become a minister, but you know I couldn't bear to disobey my father. And, besides, he believed that speaking in public was the best thing for delicate chests. He always used to say he had been consumptive in his youth, and had outgrown it through preaching. He lived to be seventy. I shall not live to be seventy, no, nor thirty. One lung has long been gone: the other is fast going. Since my hemorrhage, last autumn, the end can only be a question of time. That question the doctor here has decided. He says I cannot live three months.

"I wanted to tell you——" Dorothea read no more. The paper dropped into her lap. The Colonel had been to buy a newspaper: he came strolling back: "The Turks have been at it again," he said. "And yet, when you get to know them, you find they are really less cruel than Christians."

"Father, Mark Lester is dying."

"A pity," said the Colonel, "if true. But consumptive patients never diagnose their own case rightly, my dear."

"The doctor says so."

"Doctors are always wrong, Dorothea. Trust a man who has studied them all over the world. The only people who ever know about cases are the mediums: they somehow see your inside."

"Father, he is quite young, twenty-four, and he is alone yonder at Wiesbaden, and the doctor has told him he must die."

The Colonel sat down by his daughter's side. "That is

always a terrible experience," he said. "I have had to tell several young fellows that in my day. It is one of the things a man never gets accustomed to."

But Dorothea was hardly listening. "Dying," she repeated. "Mark! Father, we are close to Wiesbaden here—comparatively close. I must go on to see him. I cannot turn deliberately north at this point, with him so near. He is my oldest friend."

"It isn't decent for you," grumbled the Colonel, "to be pottering about like this before your uncle's funeral."

"You said you believed in Providence," she answered in a pleading tone. "Isn't it providential that you should have brought me this letter here?"

"I believe in Providence," promptly replied the Colonel, "when I recognise its actions to be providential. I started off at once on receipt of Konrad's pressing telegram. I knew I must meet you at this place, and I wanted to turn you back. So far, so good. Otherwise, I do not quite understand what has happened."

"I will explain it in the train," she answered. "Meanwhile, you will take two tickets—won't you?—to Wiesbaden: we can spend to-morrow there, Easter Sunday—I must see him, father; besides my relations, he is my only male friend."

"A dangerous position," muttered the Colonel; "but I'll do as you ask, on one condition. You will go back from Wiesbaden to the funeral at Rheyna?"

Dorothea's eyes travelled slowly round the noisy, common waiting-room: then she swept them up to her father's face. "Since when do you sell your favours to women?" she asked. She asked it lightly, almost laughingly, but for the sadness of her gaze. The Colonel walked away very quietly and came back and put her into a compartment labelled "Cologne."

It was late when they got to Wiesbaden, past midnight. Dead tired, Dorothea lay down in an hotel bed and closed her eyes. We can easily close our eyes; we cannot lock brain-doors. They slam.

But Dorothea was young and healthy—healthy of body and soul: towards morning she slept.

Much refreshed, she awoke and, knowing it was useless to disturb her father, went out in search of Mark Lester. She asked the hotel-porter to direct her cabman to the street where Mark lodged. "Gewiss, Frau Gräfin," said

the porter, bowing obsequiously. So she knew that the Colonel, at midnight, had written her new title down thus in the hotel list. She was obliged to accept it: you cannot go about with an alias. Henceforth she was the Countess of Rheyna.

Mark Lester was not at his lodgings, a humble, rather dingy, boarding-house. "He usually went to the Kurgarten on fine mornings," said the talkative, tall landlady, "to the sheltered side of the Casino they call Nice, you know. Where the sick people go and sun themselves."

"He is pretty well?" asked Dorothea.

The gaunt woman shrugged her shoulders. "This climate doesn't suit him," she said.

"You think he should go somewhere else? Should go south?"

"You must ask the Herr Doctor," replied the woman, retreating. Her words sounded heavy with doom to Dorothea, for a landlady does not declare a non-infectious lodger too ill to remain in her house, until there is no chance of his living in another's.

"Good-day."

"Can I say, if you please, who has been here?"

"I will go to him: I will write."

"It is better I should say! The Herr Pastor has few callers. If you would leave a card?"

"I have no card." She tore out a leaf from her pocket-book and wrote "Dorothea."

The landlady stared at her with sudden interest: "Ah," she said aloud, "the name which he speaks in his sleep." Then she waited for more, being a woman who dearly loved gossip, and very romantic as well.

But Dorothea had escaped towards the Kurgarten. In the full spring sunlight, among the crocuses and tulips, she saw him creeping languidly along a sheltered path.

She walked up quickly behind him. She was close beside him. He did not turn.

"Mark," she said softly. "Yes, I am come. I got your letter and I came. It isn't true, Mark: the things that the doctors say are very seldom true. We will make it untrue."

"Dorothea!" he said, "Dorothea!" He caught his breath so, he had to sit down on a bench close at hand.

"Of course it is Dorothea. If you write me such letters, you mustn't be surprised that I come to see for myself." She tried to speak cheerfully: her eyes were upon him.

He turned up his face to her. "See!" he said.

"You are looking very well," she answered, with brave resolve. As indeed she could do, for the moment. His cheeks were flushed and his eyes were bright. He had always been delicate-looking; with high cheek-bones and clear-cut profile. She saw no ravages such as she had dreaded. "You are looking very well," she said.

He laughed. "I am an impostor. You have always thought me a bit of an impostor, Dorothea."

"All my life," she replied, "I have implicitly believed in two men only, your father and your father's son."

He leant back on the seat, hard: she fancied that she saw him tremble. "No, no, you have always thought me a bit of a humbug, about the church, and so on: never mind, Dorothea, I've done my best."

She sat down beside him. "We have got to face this," she said, "and to think it out. I have come on purpose."

"And Egon," he began, "tell me——"

She put up her hand, almost against his lips. "Not now," she said, "we have got to talk this over, to work it out. I have been thinking. Who is your doctor, Mark? What is this man to say such things? We must consult some great man first, some man who knows."

He shook his head. "Mine is not a difficult case to diagnose. Any doctor can find holes in your lungs."

"But not any doctor can cure them!"

"No," he said. The sunlight fell warm across the crocuses, that swelled golden and blooming in its rays.

"You remember my cousin Borck," she continued eagerly, "that had brought up blood and was hurried off to Davos. She quite recovered: she's been married for a dozen years."

"Women can stand a good deal more than men," said Mark, smiling.

"Do you really think so, Mark? Yes, I fancy you are right. Women can stand a good deal."

Oh, how he regretted his words!

"Yet my mother died," she murmured. "I have often wondered of late why my mother died."

The sunbeams broadened over the flower-bed and the path before them. A flock of clouds were playing about the steadfast sun.

"But we had not arranged to talk about that," cried Dorothea, rising. "Come with me, Mark; the wind is

fresh. You are going to take me to your doctor: I must find out exactly what he says."

"Don't, Dorothea; it would be useless."

"How do you know? This climate may not be good for you. Another may effect your cure. You owe it to your mother and sisters that nothing should be left untried." Gently she persuaded him: his eyes began to kindle. His doctor was the husband of his landlady, he said. He let himself be led back to his lodgings, and Dorothea now first noticed the brass plate beside the door. "Dr. Med. Emil Schunz."

The doctor himself came out into the passage—a little man with inevitable gold spectacles. His curious gaze transfixed Dorothea. "Herr Doctor," began Lester without further introduction, "this lady will not believe me. She wants to hear the truth from you. Tell her, as you have told me, when I asked you, that nothing more can be done for my complaint."

The physician led the way into his room. "You had better go home," he said roughly. "The change and the rest will do you good."

"But," stammered Dorothea, "the Riviera—Madeira!"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders: "Very fine, but expensive," he said.

"Do you mean that these would do him good?" burst out Dorothea passionately.

The doctor turned from the window, whither he had wandered, his hands in his pockets. He coolly surveyed the poor pastor's friend.

"To whom have I the honour of speaking?" His manner was insolent, as befits a poor man who lives upon the poor.

"To the Countess of Rheyna."

Dr. Schunz took his hands out of his pockets and his back bent a little—then it went down with a swoop.

"I do not say that nothing remains to be done. Science nowadays is never at a loss."

"What would you advise? I want my friend to go to Davos."

The doctor grew very thoughtful and learned. He puckered his eyebrows and sat down by his bureau.

"Ich bitte, setzen die gnädige Frau Gräfin sich!"

Dorothea complied. Her heart warmed to this new rank which, in some unfathomed manner, was going to bring relief to Mark Lester.

"Davos I should not advise," said Doctor Schunz, "but there is another place, in the Alps, which would suit this particular form of the disease much better. You have heard of Prédoux?"

"No, Herr Doctor." Dorothea looked at Mark, but Mark shook his head, still lost in contemplation of the Countess of Rheyra.

"I am astonished!" said the doctor, for at Prédoux, and not at Davos, was the hotel that he got his percentage from. "Prédoux is a beautiful spot in the Vaudois Alps, sheltered, salubrious, four thousand feet high."

"And people get cured there?"

"Who get cured nowhere else," replied Schunz, delighted to think the patient would not die in his house.

"We will go to Prédoux," said Dorothea, her face beaming. For a moment all other troubles were forgotten: this hideous cloud of death was clearing away.

"Before deciding anything," said Mark Lester's grave voice, "I should think it advisable to ask the opinion of some specialist?" He spoke hesitatingly, not wishing to give offence.

"Oh, certainly—by all means, consult Gross," cried the doctor quickly. "A very clever man. Privy Councillor Gross. I will write him a note. You could not possibly do better, Frau Gräfin, than consult Privy Councillor Gross."

"So be it," said Dorothea. "Yes, Mark, you must go this afternoon and see the Privy Councillor."

The doctor bowed out the lady. She had to walk down the broad Wilhelmsstrasse alone, for Mark was too much exhausted to accompany her. She looked into his cruelly drawn face, when they parted, and her eyes filled.

Doctor Schunz clasped his hands and skipped back to his wife. And, standing before her, he repeated, in tones of awe-struck contemplation: "Die Frau Gräfin von Roden-Rheyra!"

The tall, gaunt woman, whose whole face was dreamy with novel-reading, lovingly caressed some apples she was about to peel for *compôte*.

"Das geht nicht mit rechten Dingen zu," she said.

"I care not a groschen about that," replied the doctor, "but the man will not live a month."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THAT afternoon Privy Councillor Gross received the patient. He strongly recommended Prédoux. Davos was not suitable, he said, for this form of the complaint. But Prédoux was a delightful spot in the Vaudois Alps, sheltered, salubrious, four thousand three hundred feet high. If anything could cure the invalid, it would certainly be Prédoux.

"Cure?" repeated Mark, with a strange flash in his eye.

"My dear sir, we live in an age of marvels. The resources of science are endless nowadays."

Mark Lester drove home as in a dream. He was too tired : he could not get to see Dorothea.

In the evening, the great Privy Councillor obeyed with alacrity a summons to visit the Countess Rheyna at her hotel. "I take a great interest in your patient," said Dorothea. "He is alone here: he is one of my most intimate friends. You must tell me the truth."

Privy Councillor Gross was a stout man, with an immense hairless head like a shiny red ball. His eyes also were balls, white and red, behind—naturally—spectacles. And his hands were balls (like his knees), white and red, soft and downy : to these he owed much of his success. The ball of his body rested (with a fat, gold watch-chain that looked all balls against it) on the roundness of his thighs. He puffed a little, but his manners were polished, and the names that dropped from his rounded lips were such as reassure those who recognise them, and rouse aspirations in those who do not.

"I had the honour of being well known to his Excellency the late Count, Frau Gräfin. I saw the telegram announcing his decease in last night's paper. He used frequently to come to Wiesbaden. His Excellency has consulted me for his cough."

Dorothea saw the hopelessness of hiding or altering anything, and frankly accepted her position henceforth once for all.

"Yes, my uncle died suddenly," she said. "My husband is at Rheyna. Tell me, what can I do for Mr. Lester, my friend?"

"He is very ill," said the round man. That great authority was irritably reflecting how certainly he could have sent the young minister to Mentone (where he had an excellent "correspondent") had he known to what extent he could reckon on this intimate interest of a great lady in the invalid. Schunz should have written more explicitly: Mentone was worth five per cent. more than Prédoux. Not Madeira; the man would have died at sea. "He is very ill," said the Privy Councillor.

"I know that. Will he live?" She had risen from her seat by the fireplace. A black mantle that had been drawn about her shoulders fell loose upon the couch, in a background. Her girlish figure stood before him: the light cloud of hair, the imploring eyes! He thought of her husband, my Lord Count at Rheyna: he guessed many things, wondering, calculating wrong.

"No!" he said.

"But he doesn't look as ill as that!"

"He has been ill for many years: he must often have lost blood. One lung is quite gone: the other very nearly. No human being can live without lungs."

There was quite a long silence after that. She had sunk down again on her sofa, with averted face. Presently she said, not lifting her eyes: "Does he suffer much?"

"Undoubtedly. Especially at night, I should think. His nights must be very distressing."

"He did not tell you?"

"No, he was exceedingly reticent—by nature, I should think, and perhaps for another reason."

"For what reason?"

"Perhaps he was afraid of my repeating his statements where he did not desire them to be known."

Again she waited. "But if—if he be so ill, then why—why do you send him to Prédoux?"

"He will suffer less there," replied Gross, with aplomb.

"That is quite sufficient reason. And—and how long do you think he will suffer?"

"It can only be a question of weeks. I am grieved to cause you—annoyance—Frau Gräfin, but my professional reputation is at stake: I cannot answer you wrong."

"Pray do not mind. It seems to me that since yesterday evening I have got quite accustomed to this idea of death. One soon gets accustomed to terrible things: don't you think so?" She looked round at him now.

He thought she was referring to her uncle's departure from the scene—"True, that has made her a Countess"—and he answered less amiably: "A physician gets familiarised with the idea of death. But this pastor will suffer fearfully before it is over: the last stage will be pitiable. He said he had a mother and sisters: cannot one of these go with him? He should not go alone."

Her answer was almost a cry. "They can't! The mother is paralysed, and one sister attends to her. The other has an infant a couple of months old."

The Privy Councillor shrugged his round shoulders. "A pity! Patients like that should not be left lying about in hotel rooms alone."

"You think he will want assistance?"

"Hourly assistance. A drink of water—a grape!" He rose to his feet ("He swole up," uncle Karl used to call it, and really the man's rising reminded one of an air-cushion). "Get him some one to look after him and send him away to Prédoux." The Privy Councillor rolled back from the door. "There is still one thing I ought not to omit, Frau Gräfin. Such cases are very infectious. No one should run quite unnecessary risks. Very serious risks. Some lives are so important, from a public point of view. *Ach Gott*, I remember the young Duchess of Stolzenau! But she must have been a connection of yours? Through the old Count's mother, Stolzenau-Gutelände."

"I know little of my husband's relations. Yes, his grandmother was a Prinzessin Stolzenau."

"They had a governess in the house who died of consumption. The Duchess insisted on nursing her: within a year her Highness lay dead in her grave."

"She must have had the seeds!" exclaimed Dorothea.

The old man doubtfully shook his ball of a head. "We all have the seeds," he said, "of everything," and toddled downstairs.

On the staircase he made a little speech to himself. "Grösslein," he said, "that last move was very judicious. It was like you. Always remain on the side of the altar and the hearth!"

The Herr Geheimerath still lives and flourishes at Wiesbaden. Everybody there knows him, and the funny song about him:

"Grösslein, Grösslein, Grösslein roth
Thu' mir nichts zu Leide!"

The Colonel, on coming in half an hour later, found Dorothea still sitting by the dying fire.

"Oh, by Jove! let's poke this up into a blaze!" cried the Colonel. "What a fearful place to spend Easter Sunday in!"

Dorothea looked up. "True, it is Easter Sunday!"

"You mean I should find any place dull to spend Easter Sunday in? Now, that is unjust, Dolly. Seville would be delightful—not to speak of Jerusalem, or Rome, and all Russia, and South America. They have the best bull-fight of the whole year at Seville."

"Father, you can do me the greatest kindness in your life."

"Surely I did that in coming to this place with you. Everybody drags along like snails, and the only people who don't look dying are the old generals who ought to be dead."

"Oh, don't, father! Why, this is a lovely health resort, with beautiful promenades and music. The place I want to go to is very different. I want you to take me to Prédoux."

"What is Prédoux? Dorothea, you don't mind just one little cigarette?"

"It shall be a cigar," replied Dorothea.

He burst out laughing. "What an awful place Prédoux must be!" he said.

"Mark is to go there, the doctors say. He cannot live more than a few weeks. He will suffer less, they say, at Prédoux."

"So far, so good," said the Colonel gravely, lighting his cigar.

"He is quite alone. I want to go there also—for those few weeks. I want you to take me, father."

"Surely some other person could be found to accompany your friend," said the Colonel soothingly. "A female relation—a college chum!"

"I know of no one. He must go at once while still able to travel. Oh, father, he suffers so!" Her voice broke down. "And he never spoke of it!"

"That is how all brave men suffer." The Colonel pulled at his cigar. "But this place that you speak of—Prédoux—I suppose it is one of those lung-sanatoria?"

"I believe so."

The Colonel's cigar glowed very red before he withdrew

it from his lips. "My dear, I decline to go there, or to let you go. I would rather die of something else."

"Afraid, father?" The daughter's tone was incredulous.

"I presume you will allow me a certain amount of courage, considering my past? Well, I object to put my head into a hotbed of microbes. And for Egon's sake as well as your own I forbid you to go."

"You do not mean that literally, father?"

"Well, no, of course not literally. Not patriarchally. I have no business to order you about. I never advise any one. But your own common sense, Dorothea, will teach you how to behave." These last words the Colonel ventured doubtfully, as a man risks a throw.

"I know there are pro's and con's," said Dorothea. "I don't mean about the infection. I can't trouble about that, somehow. But—other things. I can't help it. I must take him there: I can't desert him. Once there, some one else will join us, if you won't—oh, do, father, come!"

"You mean to establish yourself there with this man?"

"No, father: I don't want to do anything eccentric. I hate being eccentric, and strange——"

"Unwomanly," cried the Colonel. Dorothea blushed. "Improper." Dorothea drew herself up. "I shall not do anything improper. Of course, he must have suitable attendance, a nurse. I shall live near him: at any rate, until some one else can come out. Oh, father, the whole thing may be a question of days."

"And who is to pay for him?" asked the Colonel in a lower key, already repentant of a vehemence foreign to his nature.

"Please don't talk about money, father."

The Colonel laughed, in his vexation, at this echo of himself. But only the vexation remained when he spoke.

"Well, of course, you must manage your own affairs. You have always done so. You will leave your husband at Rheyna——"

"Giulietta is there!" She had turned like an animal at bay. Against her will the cry had escaped her.

"Naturally. Whose fault is that? The more reason for you to return. You will hardly stay on together. Leave her there, if you prefer, and accompany your pastor, who doesn't by any means look dying to me—I don't believe the doctors. Arrange your own life, my dear Dolly, but, really, I have no wish to catch the most infectious disease of our day."

Dorothea had never seen her father so much put out : he began striding up and down the room, humming "*Donna è Mobile*." But he had no experience of this fact in his daughter's case, and, what was more, did not believe it of her.

"I cannot act differently," said Dorothea. "I must take Mark at once. Some one must take him. If he has another hemorrhage to-night, he may never be able to travel at all."

The Colonel could not help contemplating the advantages of this contingency.

"I have stated my opinion : there is no use in repeating it," he said, and walked out of the room.

Dorothea went to the window. Easter bells were ringing in the stillness. It was a lovely night. "He is arisen ! He is arisen ?" Death and desolation were in her heart.

Next morning, before midday—on Easter Monday, in all the turmoil of holiday making—she started for Prédoux with her patient and a German nurse. The Colonel had relented : he went with them. "I will take you there," said the Colonel, "and back."

As for the sick man, it seemed as if Dorothea's coming had broken some strain which was keeping him up. He sank down and let them do as they liked with him. "Well, yes, undoubtedly he is ill : he is very much worse," said the Colonel. Sandring retreated to a smoking-compartment, where he told to a chance acquaintance the funny stories he had heard from Mark at Bel Respiro ; stories whose lost memory this fresh meeting had recalled. When the train stopped at stations, Dorothea could hear him laughing. So could Mark.

More dead than alive the patient ended the long railway journey. A crisis had come upon him. The deaconess sniffed the thin mountain-air, moist with the first melting of the snows. "It is murder," she said to herself.

The Colonel came to a similar conclusion, only differing as to the victim concerned. A few hours after his arrival he sauntered along the terrace—there was a very big, sheltered terrace, with wooden sun-boxes and covered glass galleries. Everywhere lay the patients, on couches, wrapped up, in the snow and the sun. The Colonel, at his breakfast, had observed the hectic waiters. The man in the shop where he went to buy a newspaper could hardly answer him for coughing. He was right : the place was melancholy with a tragic sadness, too deep to be dwelt on here.

"Do people ever get better?" asked the Colonel of the chemist. He had gone in to purchase a (perfectly futile) disinfectant.

"Hundreds, if only they come soon enough."

"But the danger of contagion?"

"Not here," said the chemist quickly, "the air is too pure."

The Colonel went and found his daughter. Before he could begin she stopped him.

"I am going to stay. When I spoke of leaving, he said: 'Yes, it is better. Go.' But the tears were in his eyes. I saw them. I have never seen them there before. Father, if I went back now to Brodryck, where nobody wants me, and left him here alone, you would scorn me!"

The Colonel shrugged his shoulders, very slightly. He was a polished man: he could shrug his shoulders well. "I never dispute with a woman who has made up her mind. And, at least, what you make up, Dolly, is worthy of the name. I shall endeavour to send you your aunts."

"Do not do that! This is no place to bring them to!"

Sandring cast a keen glance at his daughter. "If you were not what you are, and that man were not so ill—well, never mind! Before I go, there is one point I should like to speak about." The Colonel nervously twirled his moustache. "You have no objection, I suppose, to Mrs. Sandring and me remaining settled, a little more definitely, at the Manor House? Now you have come into all this splendour, you will hardly ever be there!"

Dorothea sighed the sigh of the hopelessly misunderstood.

"The place has memories for me," continued the Colonel glibly. "Touching memories of my youth. Your mother—however, don't let's talk of things unpleasant to you. Besides, you never knew your mother. She was better than most women I have known, Dorothea. I like to think I am living in her house."

"Certainly, certainly; stay as long as you like."

"You see, Mrs. Sandring and I are placed in a difficult position. It is absurd to think that any human being can subsist on a thousand a year. *That* was a mistake of your poor mother's, or rather, her father treated me badly. And I never can trouble about money-matters. The income settled on me was a—pittance."

"Would you—would you object to my doubling it, father?"

"My dear child, you are always sweet. And I shall have to keep up my position now, *you* know—*your* position—as the father of the Countess of Roden-Rheyna—the Countess of Roden-Rheyna, by Jove! On two thousand we could go south in the winter, and come to the Manor House, as your guests, in the summer months. That would be an agreeable arrangement for all parties. "You would not mind, Dorothea, my—eh—bringing some people sometimes to liven the place up?"

"No, no: I should not mind," said Dorothea, reflecting that she could always escape to the aunts.

He came up to her and kissed her. You are a dear good girl," he said. "It's a mercy your husband can't see you up here. You treat him very badly, Dorothea."

"I have written to him."

"What?"

"That I found Mark Lester very ill at Wiesbaden. That I have brought him here and shall stay with him, and comfort him all I can."

"Dorothy, do you remember my telling you that you should love Egon for himself, and not for your conception of his virtues?"

"Yes, father."

"I am beginning to think you can love him for both. And—what is much better—I believe you are beginning to see the same thing. As for your attitude towards this Mark Lester, your husband is a good fellow, I hope he will understand it. I am not a good fellow: I confess that I am quite unable to make head or tail of it." Before Dorothea could recover sufficiently to find any answer, the Colonel had whistled himself out of the room.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DOROTHEA remained alone in the little pension she had found for herself, down in the village—a wooden Swiss chalet, common and cheap—among several dozen similar chalets and stables, half-hidden in a morass of melting snow and manure. A couple of hundred feet higher the great sanatorium, with its load of sorrow, rose against the pine-woods. Above it the stern wall of granite, sheltering and grim—before it, southwards, the wide fall of valley, immense under blue sky and sunshine, down to the clouds that lie heavy through the winter on the river, with its cities and the railway and the ordinary habitats of men.

Dorothea, from her little latchet window, looked across the deep-sunk lake of mist into the voiceless silence, to the snow-peaks solemnly filling the horizon—loftiest, most magnificent among them, the great cathedral glories of the Dent du Midi. Unequaled among the mountains of Europe, in its harmony of white slopes and summits, its base upon the waters, its brow against the sky.

Twice a day she ploughed through the inexpressible mire of the road up to the Sanatorium. It was the worst time of the year for Prédoux: the vast winter snows were softening. Those well enough were beginning to leave the hotel.

Mark Lester, under the care of his nurse, lay out on the great verandah. There Dorothea would come and sit beside him, reading, if he asked for it, bringing fruit, gazing for hours, in comparative silence, at the sunshine, the far mountains beyond.

She read to him, amongst other things, "Hamlet." "It has always been my favourite," he said. "There never lived a man I understood as well as Hamlet." He would lie back, listening with pleasure to her voice, for she read well.

"'But that the fear of something after death——'"

It was there he stopped her. "I don't like that," he

said. "I don't like that. I have passed far beyond it—far beyond."

She gazed at him.

He sat up a bit and smiled to her. "I am a Protestant Hamlet," he said, "and a Hamlet after the French Revolution. Nothing can alter that. Dorothy, do you remember our talk about the world outside—how I loathed it? Often I think that I did you harm. At Bel Respiro I thought so. I loathe all the horror and the wickedness as much as ever, but the world—the world—now that I am going to leave it, I think I understand."

"I understand nothing!" she burst out suddenly, quite suddenly, with the pent agonies of months. "Why—why must we struggle on so unreasonably? Why must I, of all women, meet with *this* fate? Why must Egon, my husband, whom I thought so good and noble, break down and suffer *thus*? Why does God——"

He held out his hand. "How do you know it is God?" he said.

She stammered, confounded. "Why, of course it is God! Our lives are in His hands: He rules the world."

Mark Lester's gaze sank upon her. "Twenty long years I believed that lie," he said: "God ruled the world. It was God who was somehow mysteriously responsible for all its triumphant wickedness, its defeat and destruction of good. I looked down the pages of history. Everywhere I saw that the evil cause conquers, that the tyrant grows powerful, that the empire increases which is built up on cruelty and fraud. God does it all. In private life of course it is the same. The cheat and the liar become great: the honest man cannot compete with them. God arranges it so."

"But God rules the world, Mark."

"We have just been celebrating Easter, Dorothea! Has it never struck you how utterly Christ failed? Hanged as a malefactor! And He has failed to this day. Augustus was a better sovereign—a wider-hearted, greater ruler—than any that sits on a European throne in our time. And the priests of Jerusalem, as we see them in Josephus, were honester, cleaner fanatics than the smirking ecclesiastics that adore our modern god of Prosperity. Is there a thinking being that doubts Christ's condemnation by a council of Christian princes and popes? God is fighting the Prince of this World, Dorothea, and—oh! He is losing the day!"

The young man fell back: his breast heaved: his

glistening eyes were fixed upon the silvery summits. But he hurried on, in short gasps: "'All these will I give thee'—they were his to give. The Prince of this World has kept them. The Son of Man, when He comes, will He find faith on this earth? He thinks it doubtful: but He knows He will find plenty of bishops. We live in an evil time, Dorothea, the age of Juvenal—but you don't know about that. One thing only is certain: God loves the world. Oh, one thing is certain: God loves the world!"

He leant forward, and his voice gained strength. "He so loves the world that He gave Himself, in some wonderful way, unto death and failure! Still, still—He is doing it still. Fighting against terrible odds, fighting desperately—and they who seek after righteousness must fight with Him, must help Him, hand to hand against the world around them, the flesh in themselves, the devil in all places, ruler triumphant—hand to hand they must fight, or—oh madness!—He—He—will be conquered in the end!"

Then he fell back.

"Hush," she said hastily. "Hush." She rose and got a handkerchief to wipe the froth from his lips.

"It is for *that* we bear it all," he whispered. "I wanted to tell you, what, to me, has made all things plain. And thus we 'fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in our bodies.' So I can bear the pain, the pain. Dear, did you think it was God who was making me suffer this agony week after week? It is nearly over now: you know that as well as I do, or I shouldn't have spoken. Dorothea, oh, I want you to understand. The Devil—the Power of Evil—fights against us, so mighty, almost almighty—look at the world around! We must fight—we who want to—we must help each other! God will conquer in the end!"

He closed his eyes, and his lips went on whispering inaudibly. Dorothea stood thunderstruck. Never before had he spoken a word about his sufferings, and though of course she knew of them, the truth sounded terribly different from his lips.

She went home, to her long quiet evening, in the pension-bedroom, very thoughtful. And she took a newspaper-cutting from the blotter in her dressing-case, and read it again.

It was a description of the funeral at Rheyna. The last sentence ran: "The absence of the young Countess was very much remarked." This sentence was heavily under-

scored in blue pencil: the postmark of the newspaper was Kauenfels.

Dorothea smiled. She was beginning to understand Dickie, and to distinguish very clearly between protection and persecution, between interest and intrigue.

But that night, somehow, her prayers sounded different: no longer an almost unwilling resignation to a hopelessly incomprehensible Almighty, but a cry for help and comfort against an enemy to a power that knew struggle and suffering as she. One thing only she begged for, if God could grant it, one thing above all others—to know of Giulietta, her connection with Egon—where was she?—in his home?—in his heart?

And the God in whom she trusted sent her a reply. As such she accepted it, when, a few days later, the postman toiling up with the letter-bag from the last outpost of civilisation down in the valley, ten miles away, brought her an envelope, on which she recognised, to her tremulous amazement, the delicate handwriting of the Italian.

“Read what I say,” wrote Giulietta. “Do not answer: it is true, by the blessed Madonna in Heaven! I am returned to my husband: we shall trouble you and yours no more. I write partly for his sake, for he wills it; partly for my own. The luck has come back at the tables: we shall not be poor. Yet his dreams and mine are still far from fulfilment: perhaps, if there be peace and atonement, the Madonna will aid us—then *he* will put an end to money, *I* to ugliness in this world. Meanwhile, then, I make confession: I make it willingly, for I love your husband, and you I do not hate. I am not ashamed to love him: can I help myself? I am not, perhaps, as you women of the ice-lands—he is beautiful as a god and I loved him: fate is stronger than the saints. But see, most of the blame, if blame there be in your chill northern heart, has been mine. And see, that recently I came to the Castle, of that he knew nothing: he is nowise at fault. I had come but a few hours before your arrival: I left a few hours after. He wished me to go. That we met in the chapel was neither your doing nor mine, but that devil, Dickie’s: she had sent for me. He loves you, fool, with a very different glow from the flare of his passion for me. And yet he loved me, me also, for a moment. He loved me as Tannhäuser loved Venus: go, then, shall Tannhäuser never again lie at the feet of the Madonna?”

Dorothea read this letter on the snow-drifts, with gladness and trembling. She lifted her eyes to the wide blue above her, the distant, still line of the Alps. And again, in her bosom, arose prayers unspoken for the woman away yonder at Kauenfels, Dickie.

Slowly she crept up to the Grand Hotel, with anxious steps that yet lagged under the weight of approaching disaster. The deaconess had prepared her for the worst. "They have sent him here to die," said the deaconess. "In no case could he have lived longer than a few weeks, but the journey and the change of climate have killed him."

She found him, as usual, on the verandah, with the great sea of sunshine before him, his eyes on the everlasting hills. They lightened up, those strong eyes, with a light that she could not read. He thanked God, in sad content, that she would never read it: the secret of his life was dying with him, the long, slow secret, dying fast.

She sat down beside him, and at once she saw, alarmed, the change that had come over his face. The sister beckoned her aside. "He would not have you called," said the sister. "He was very ill last night. The doctor does not think he can live through the day."

The room swam around Dorothea, for so it is always. We see our dear ones dying, but we do not believe in their death.

She sank back in her seat and took hold of his hand. The book lay open on her knees: there would be no reading that day. Her eyes settled, dwelling on other things, upon the staring page:

"Oh, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown."

She closed the volume impatiently. It seemed to her as if it screamed a lie.

And the silent hours passed on. The sun ascended slowly in the vast, untroubled sky. All around, in windless stillness, glittered the sloping fields of snow. And yonder, away in the far Valais, the white mountains, rising to God.

She sat holding his hand in her own, with her gaze on his eyes that were closed, on his breast that rose ceaselessly and fell.

When he opened his eyes at last, it was to beckon her with them towards him. "There is one thing more," he whispered, "I would say. I have never had the courage. But now I am dying, I dare. Dorothea, when you go back to Egon—for you will go back—there is a thing you

must think of—think it out to yourself—no one can speak of it. Dear, the purity of a man, of a woman, these are not the same. Do not ask aunt Mary. Of course pure is pure, yet——” He paused and lay long silent; then, gasping:

“Think it out for yourself: they are not the same. Evil is evil before God, yet—yet they are not the same. God has willed it so: there should be difference between man and woman—lesser measure—other passion—greater fault. Woman’s cowardice is not like man’s: there is a difference. I—I am not speaking for myself, dear—truth is truth—I—was not a bad man, Dorothea.” His eyes closed heavily: he did not open them again. And the languid hours crept upwards in the stillness.

Once he breathed, very faintly, almost inaudibly: “Dearest——” She sat, gazing down upon his placid features, and wondered if the breathing had stopped.

Then, when she knew it was so, she sat there still. Slowly there deepened upon her a light such as floods an undiscovered inner room. Slowly, with her gaze upon those features that would never live again before her, she realised a phase of her own soul’s existence, which had slumbered, untouched, undreamed of, in hidden depths of kindness and affection. She felt, with purity unruffled but by pity, that, had life shaped itself to other forms for her, this friend of her youth, whose untold love had died with him, might have become to her more than a friend. Her soul could have knit itself to this man’s soul in faultless and righteous union: there had been room for him, a place unfilled by fate, in the vague possibilities of her heart.

And yet—she loved Egon, her husband, in fulness of wifely loving. The reality rose next to the vision, spread over it and wiped it away. For the things that are—oh, God be thanked!—are better than the things that might have been.

She bent down, in solemn sadness, and kissed the dead man on the forehead. A new womanhood awoke within her amid her desolation, a wider womanhood of longing and yearning, a tenderness of pity and pardon, the consciousness that love has many forms and that human hearts are weak. She stood beside the dead face, gazing—gazing! In the cloudless dome of heaven the victorious sun rode high.

She went to the man in his office. Regardless of herself, of the man’s impassive stare, she sent her message along the wires:

"Thou knowest that I love thee. Forgive me, for I wronged thee. Come!"

They brought her the answer where she sat, at the sudden fall of twilight, in the dead man's chamber. Her eyes were on the gleaming horizon: her heart was tremulous with sadness and compassion: her heart was musical with hope.

"Love, oh, my Love! God is merciful. Thou knowest that I wronged thee. Come!"

THE END.

